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REV.D JOHN NEWTON,

Late Rector of the United Parishes of S.t Mary Woolnoth & S.t Mary Woolchurch, Haw.

Born at London 24th July 1725 O.S. Died 21. of Dec.r 1807.

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THE

WORKS

OF

THE REV. JOHN NEWTON,

LATE

RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES

OF

ST. MARY WOOLNOTH & ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH HAW,

LONDON.

From the last London Edition,

PUBLISHED BY DIRECTION OF HIS EXECUTORS.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

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AN

AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE

OF

SOME REMARKABLE AND INTERESTING PARTICULARS

IN THE

LIFE OF *********.

COMMUNICATED,

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS,

TO THE

REV. T. HAWEIS,

RECTOR OF ALDWINCKLE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE;

AND BY HIM, AT THE REQUEST OF FRIENDS, NOW MADE PUBLIC.

I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them. *Is.* xlii. 16.

I am as a wonder unto many. *Psal.* lxxi. 7.

PREFACE.

THE first of the following letters is so well adapted an introduction to the rest, that to trouble the reader with a long preface would be quite needless and impertinent. I will therefore detain him from entering upon the delightful and instructive relation which the following sheets present him with, little longer than while I assure him, that the narrative is quite genuine, and that the following letters were written to me at my request. Some verbal relations of the facts awakened my curiosity to see a more connected account of them, which the author very obligingly consented to, having at that time no intention of its being made public. But the repeated solicitations of friends have at last prevailed: and indeed the publication is the more needful, as several imperfect copies have been handed about, and there has been cause to think some surreptitious edition might steal through the press into the hands of the public.

I have therefore, with consent of the author, now sent these Letters abroad in their original form. They were written in haste, as letters of friendship, to gratify my curiosity; but the style, as well as the narrative itself, is so plain and easy, that corrections were thought needless. I can only add my best wishes, that the great truths they contain may prove as edifying as the facts are striking and entertaining.

T. HAWEIS.

Aldwinckle, Aug. 1764.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

LETTER I.

Reverend and Dear Sir,

I MAKE no doubt but you have at times had pleasing reflections upon that promise made to the Israelites, Deut. viii. 2. They were then in the wilderness, surrounded with difficulties, which were greatly aggravated by their own distrust and perverseness: they had experienced a variety of dispensations, the design of which they could not as yet understand; they frequently lost sight of God's gracious purposes in their favour, and were much discouraged by reason of the way. To compose and animate their minds, Moses here suggests to them, that there was a future happy time drawing near, when their journey and warfare should be finished; that they should soon be put in possession of the promised land, and have rest from all their fears and troubles: and then it would give them pleasure to look back upon what they now found so uneasy to bear:—"Thou shalt remember all the way by which "the Lord thy God led thee through this wilderness."

But the importance and comfort of these words is still greater, if we consider them in a spiritual sense, as addressed to all who are passing through the wilderness of this world to a heavenly Canaan; who by faith in the promises and power of God, are seeking an eternal rest in that kingdom which cannot be sha-

ken. The hope of that glorious inheritance inspires us with some degree of courage and zeal to press forward to where Jesus has already entered as our fore-runner; and when our eye is fixed upon him, we are more than conquerors over all that would withstand our progress. But we have not yet attained; we still feel the infirmities of a fallen nature; through the remains of ignorance and unbelief, we often mistake the Lord's dealings with us, and are ready to complain, when, if we knew all, we should rather rejoice. But to us likewise there is a time coming, when our warfare shall be accomplished, our views enlarged, and our light increased: then with what transports of adoration and love shall we look back upon the way by which the Lord led us! We shall then see and acknowledge, that mercy and goodness directed every step; we shall see, that what our ignorance once called adversities and evils, were in reality blessings, which we could not have done well without; that nothing befel us without a cause; that no trouble came upon us sooner, or pressed us more heavily, or continued longer, than our case required; in a word, that our many afflictions were each in their place among the means employed by divine grace and wisdom, to bring us to the possession of that exceeding and eternal weight of glory which the Lord has prepared for his people. And, even in this imperfect state, though we are seldom able to judge aright of our present circumstances, yet if we look upon the years of our past life, and compare the dispensations we have been brought through, with the frame of our minds under each successive period; if we consider how wonderfully one thing has been connected with another, so that what we now number amongst our greatest advantages, perhaps,

took their first rise from incidents which we thought hardly worth our notice; and that we have sometimes escaped the greatest dangers that threatened us, not by any wisdom or foresight of our own, but by the intervention of circumstances which we neither desired nor thought of:—I say, when we compare and consider these things by the light afforded us in the holy Scripture, we may collect indisputable proof, from the narrow circle of our own concerns, that the wise and good providence of God watches over his people from the earliest moment of their life, over-rules and guards them through all their wanderings in a state of ignorance, leads them in a way that they know not, till at length his providence and grace concur in those events and impressions which bring them to the knowledge of him and themselves.

I am persuaded, that every believer will, upon due reflection, see enough in his own case to confirm this remark; but not all in the same degree. The outward circumstances of many have been uniform; they have known but little variety in life; and with respect to their inward change, it has been effected in a secret way, unnoticed by others, and almost unperceived by themselves.—The Lord has spoken to them, not in thunder and tempest, but with a still small voice he has drawn them gradually to himself: so that, though they have a happy assurance of the thing, that they know and love him, and are passed from death unto life; yet of the precise time and manner, they can give little account. Others he seems to select, in order to show the exceeding riches of his grace, and the greatness of his mighty power: he suffers the natural rebellion and wickedness of their hearts to have full scope; while sinners of less note are cut off with little warning,

these are spared, though sinning with a high hand, and as it were studying their own destruction. At length, when all that knew them are perhaps expecting to hear that they are made signal instances of divine vengeance, the Lord, (whose thoughts are high above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth,) is pleased to pluck them as brands out of the fire, and to make them monuments of his mercy, for the encouragement of others: they are beyond expectation, convinced, pardoned, and changed. A case of this sort indicates a divine power no less than the creation of a world: it is evidently the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in the eyes of all those who are not blinded by prejudice and unbelief.

Such was the persecuting Saul: his heart was full of enmity against *Jesus of Nazareth*, and therefore he persecuted and made havoc of his disciples. He had been a terror to the church of Jerusalem, and was going to Damascus with the same views.—He was yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against all that loved the Lord Jesus.—He thought little of the mischief he had hitherto done.—He was engaged for the suppression of the whole sect; and hurrying from house to house, from place to place, he carried menaces in his look, and repeated threatenings with every breath. Such was his spirit and temper, when the Lord Jesus, whom he hated and opposed, checked him in the height of his rage, called this bitter persecutor to the honour of an apostle, and inspired him with great zeal and earnestness, to preach that faith which he so lately destroyed.

Nor are we without remarkable displays of the same sovereign efficacious grace in our own times. ——I may particularly mention the instance of the

late colonel Gardener. If any real satisfaction could be found in a sinful course, he would have met with it; for he pursued the experiment with all possible advantages.—He was habituated to evil; and many uncommon, almost miraculous deliverances, made no impression upon him. Yet *he* likewise was made willing in the day of God's power: and the bright example of his life, illustrated and diffused by the account of him published since his death, has afforded an occasion of much praise to God, and much comfort to his people.

After the mention of such names, can you permit me, Sir, to add *my own?* If I do, it must be with a very humbling distinction. These once eminent sinners proved eminent Christians: much had been forgiven them; they loved much. St. Paul could say, "The "grace bestowed upon me was not in vain; for I la- "boured more abundantly than they all." Colonel Gardener likewise was as a city set upon a hill, a burning and a shining light: the manner of his conversion was hardly more singular, than the whole course of his conversation from that time to his death. Here, alas! the parallel greatly fails. It has not been thus with me. —I must take deserved shame to myself, that I have made very unsuitable returns for what I have received. But if the question is only concerning the patience and long-suffering of God, the wonderful interposition of his providence in favour of an unworthy sinner, the power of his grace in softening the hardest heart, and the riches of his mercy in pardoning the most enormous and aggravated transgressions; in these respects I know no case more extraordinary than my own. And indeed most persons to whom I have related my story, have thought it worthy of being preserved.

I never gave any succinct account, in writing, of the Lord's dealing with me, till very lately: for I was deterred, on the one hand, by the great difficulty of writing properly when *Self* is concerned; on the other, by the ill use which persons of corrupt and perverse minds are often known to make of such instances. The Psalmist reminds us, that a reserve in these things is proper, when he says, "Come and hear, all ye *that fear God*, "and I will declare what he hath done for my soul;" and our Lord cautions us not to "cast pearls before "swine." The pearls of a Christian are, perhaps, his choice experiences of the Lord's power and love in the concerns of his soul; and these should not be, at all adventures, made public, lest we give occasion to earthly and grovelling souls to profane what they cannot understand. These were the chief reasons of my backwardness; but a few weeks since I yielded to the judgment and request of a much respected friend, and sent him a relation at large, in a series of eight letters. The event has been what I little expected: I wrote to one person; but my letters have fallen into many hands: amongst others, I find they have reached your notice; and, instead of blaming me for being too tedious, and circumstantial, which was the fault I feared I had committed, you are pleased to desire a still more distinct detail. As you and others of my friends apprehend my compliance with this request may be attended with some good effect, may promote the pleasing work of praise to our adorable Redeemer, or confirm the faith of some or other of his people, I am willing to obey: I give up my own reasonings upon the inexpediency of so inconsiderable a person as myself adventuring in so public a point of view. If God may be glorified on my behalf, and his children in any

measure comforted or instructed by what I have to declare of his goodness, I shall be satisfied; and am content to leave all other possible consequences of this undertaking in his hands who does all things well.

I must again have recourse to my memory, as I retained no copies of the letters you saw. So far as I can recollect what I then wrote, I will relate; but shall not affect a needless variety of phrase and manner, merely because those have been already perused by many. I may, perhaps, in some places, when repeating the same facts, express myself in nearly the same words; yet I propose, according to your desire, to make this relation more explicit and particular than the former; especially towards the close, which I wound up hastily, lest my friend should be wearied. I hope you will likewise excuse me, if I do not strictly confine myself to narration, but now and then intersperse such reflections as may offer while I am writing; and though you have signified your intentions of communicating what I send you to others, I must not on this account affect a conciseness and correctness, which is not my natural talent, lest the whole should appear dry and constrained. I shall, therefore, if possible, think only of you, and write with that confidence and freedom which your friendship and candour deserve. This sheet may stand as a preface; and I purpose, as far as I can, to intermit many other engagements, until I have completed the task you have assigned me. In the mean time, I entreat the assistance of your prayers, that in this, and all my poor attempts, I may have a single eye to his glory, who was pleased to call me out of horrid darkness into the marvellous light of his gospel.

Jan. 12, 1763. I am, &c.

LETTER II.

Reverend Sir,

I CAN sometimes feel a pleasure in repeating the grateful acknowledgment of David, "O Lord, I am thy "servant, the son of thine handmaid; thou hast loosed "my bands." The tender mercies of God towards me were manifested in the first moment of my life.—— I was born as it were in his house, and dedicated to him in my infancy. My mother, (as I have heard from many,) was a pious experienced Christian: she was a Dissenter, in communion with the late Dr. Jennings. I was her only child; and as she was of a weak constitution, and a retired temper, almost her whole employment was the care of my education. I have some faint remembrance of her care and instructions. At a time when I could not be more than three years of age, she herself taught me English; and with so much success, (as I had something of a forward turn,) that when I was four years old, I could read with propriety in any common book that offered. She stored my memory, which was then very retentive, with many valuable pieces, chapters, and portions of Scripture, catechisms, hymns, and poems. My temper at that time seemed quite suitable to her wishes: I had little inclination to the noisy sports of children, but was best pleased when in her company, and always as willing to learn as she was to teach me. How far the best education may fall short of reaching the heart, will strongly appear in the sequel of my history: yet I think, for the encouragement of pious parents to go on in the good way, of doing their part faithfully to form

their children's minds, I may properly propose myself as an instance. Though in process of time I sinned away all the advantages of these early impressions, yet they were for a great while a restraint upon me; they returned again and again, and it was very long before I could wholly shake them off; and when the Lord at length opened my eyes, I found a great benefit from the recollection of them. Further, my dear mother, besides the pains she took with me, often commended me with many prayers and tears to God; and I doubt not but I reap the fruits of these prayers to this hour.

My mother observed my early progress with peculiar pleasure, and intended from the first to bring me up with a view to the ministry, if the Lord should so incline my heart. In my sixth year I began to learn Latin; but before I had time to know much about it, the intended plan of my education was broke short.—The Lord's designs were far beyond the views of an earthly parent: he was pleased to reserve me for an unusual proof of his patience, providence, and grace; and therefore over-ruled the purpose of my friends, by depriving me of this excellent parent when I was something under seven years old. I was born the 24th July 1725, and she died the 11th of that month 1732.

My father was then at sea, (he was a commander in the Mediterranean trade at that time:) he came home the following year; and soon after married again. Thus I passed into different hands. I was well treated in all other respects; but the loss of my mother's instructions was not repaired. I was now permitted to mingle with careless and profane children, and soon began to learn their ways. Soon after my father's marriage I was sent to a boarding-school in Essex, where the imprudent severity of the master almost

broke my spirit, and relish for books. With him I forgot the first principles and rules of arithmetic, which my mother had taught me years before. I staid there two years: in the last of the two a new usher coming, who observed and suited my temper, I took to the Latin with great eagerness; so that before I was ten years old, I reached and maintained the first post in the second class, which in that school read Tully and Virgil. I believe I was pushed forward too fast, and therefore not being grounded, I soon lost all I had learned, (for I left school in my tenth year;) and when I long afterwards undertook the Latin language from books, I think I had little if any advantage from what I had learned before.

My father's second marriage was from a family in Essex; and when I was eleven years old, he took me with him to sea. He was a man of remarkable good sense, and great knowledge of the world; he took great care of my morals, but could not supply my mother's part. Having been educated himself in Spain, he always observed an air of distance and severity in his carriage, which overawed and discouraged my spirit. I was always in fear when before him, and therefore he had the less influence. From that time to the year 1742 I made several voyages; but with considerable intervals between; which were chiefly spent in the country, excepting a few months in my fifteenth year, when I was placed upon a very advantageous prospect at Alicant in Spain. But my unsettled behaviour, and impatience of restraint, rendered that design abortive.

In this period, my temper and conduct were exceedingly various. At school, or soon after, I had little concern about religion, and easily received very ill impressions. But I was often disturbed with con-

victions. I was fond of reading from a child; among other books, *Bennet's Christian Oratory* often came in my way: and though I understood but little of it, the course of life therein recommended appeared very desirable; and I was inclined to attempt it. I began to pray, to read the Scripture, and keep a sort of diary. I was presently religious in my own eyes; but, alas! this seeming goodness had no solid foundation, but passed away like a morning-cloud, or the early dew. I was soon weary, gradually gave it up, and became worse than before. Instead of prayer, I learned to curse and blaspheme, and was exceedingly wicked when from under my parent's view. All this was before I was twelve years old. About that time I had a dangerous fall from a horse: I was thrown, I believe, within a few inches of a hedge-row newly cut down. I got no hurt; but could not avoid taking notice of a gracious providence in my deliverance; for had I fell upon the stakes, I had inevitably been killed. My conscience suggested to me the dreadful consequences, if in such a state I had been summoned to appear before God. I presently broke off from my profane practices, and appeared quite altered. But it was not long before I declined again. These struggles between sin and conscience were often repeated; but the consequence was, that every relapse sunk me still into greater depths of wickedness. I was once roused by the loss of an intimate companion. We had agreed to go on board a man of war, (I think it was on a Sunday;) but I providentially came too late; the boat was overset, and he and several others were drowned. I was invited to the funeral of my play-fellow, and was exceedingly affected, to think that by a delay of a few minutes, (which had much displeased

and angered me till I saw the event,) my life had been preserved. However, this likewise was soon forgot. At another time, the perusal of the *Family-Instructor* put me upon a partial and transient reformation. In brief, though I cannot distinctly relate particulars, I think I took up and laid aside a religious profession three or four different times before I was sixteen years of age: but all this while my heart was insincere. I often saw a necessity of religion as a means of escaping hell; but I loved sin, and was unwilling to forsake it. Instances of this, I can remember, were frequent in the midst of all my forms: I was so strangely blind and stupid, that sometimes when I have been determined upon things which I knew were sinful, and contrary to my duty, I could not go on quietly till I had first dispatched my ordinary task of prayer, in which I have grudged every moment of my time; and when this was finished, my conscience was in some measure pacified, and I could rush into folly with little remorse.

My last reform was the most remarkable both for degree and continuance. Of this period, at least of some part of it, I may say in the apostle's words, "After the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a "Pharisee." I did every thing that might be expected from a person entirely ignorant of God's righteousness, and desirous to establish his own. I spent the greatest part of every day in reading the Scriptures, meditation, and prayer. I fasted often; I even abstained from all animal food for three months; I would hardly answer a question, for fear of speaking an idle word. I seemed to bemoan my former miscarriages very earnestly, sometimes with tears. In short, I became an ascetic, and endeavoured, so far as my situation would permit, to renounce society, that I might

avoid temptation. I continued in this serious mood, (I cannot give it a higher title,) for more than two years, without any considerable breaking off: but it was a poor religion; it left me, in many respects, under the power of sin; and, so far as it prevailed, only tended to make me gloomy, stupid, unsociable, and useless.

Such was the frame of my mind when I became acquainted with lord Shaftesbury. I saw the second volume of his *Characteristics* in a petty shop at Middleburg, in Holland. The title allured me to buy it, and the style and manner gave me great pleasure in reading, especially the second piece, which his lordship, with great propriety, has entitled, *A Rhapsody*. Nothing could be more suited to the romantic turn of my mind, than the address of this pompous declamation. Of the design and tendency I was not aware: I thought the author a most religious person, and that I had only to follow him and be happy. Thus, with fine words, and fair speeches, my simple heart was beguiled. This book was always in my hand: I read it till I could very nearly repeat the Rhapsody *verbatim* from beginning to end. No immediate effect followed; but it operated like a slow poison, and prepared the way for all that followed.

This letter brings my history down to December 1742. I was then lately returned from a voyage; and my father not intending me for the sea again, was thinking how to settle me in the world: but I had little life or spirit for business; I knew but little of men and things. I was fond of a visionary scheme of a contemplative life, a medley of religion, philosophy, and indolence; and was quite averse to the thoughts of an industrious application to business. At length a mer-

chant in Liverpool, an intimate friend of my father's (to whom, as the instrument of God's goodness, I have since been chiefly indebted for all my earthly comforts,) proposed to send me for some years to Jamaica, and to charge himself with the care of my future fortune. I consented to this; and every thing was prepared for my voyage. I was upon the point of setting out the following week. In the mean time my father sent me on some business to a place a few miles beyond Maidstone in Kent; and this little journey, which was to have been only for three or four days, occasioned a sudden and remarkable turn, which roused me from the habitual indolence I had contracted, and gave rise to the series of uncommon dispensations, of which you desire a more particular account. So true it is, that "the "way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that "walketh to direct his steps."

I am affectionately,

January 13, 1763. Yours in the best bonds.

LETTER III.

Dear Sir,

A FEW days before my intended journey into Kent, I received an invitation to visit a family in that county. They were distant relations, but very intimate friends of my dear mother. She died in their house; but a coolness took place upon my father's second marriage, and I had heard nothing of them for many years. As my road lay within half a mile of their house, I obtained my father's leave to call on them. I was, however, very indifferent about it, and sometimes thought of pass-

ing on : however, I went. I was known at first sight before I could tell my name, and met with the kindest reception, as the child of a dear deceased friend. —My friends had two daughters. The eldest, (as I understood some years afterwards,) had been often considered by her mother and mine, as a future wife for me, from the time of her birth. I know, indeed, that intimate friends frequently amuse themselves with such distant prospects for their children, and that they miscarry much oftener than succeed. I do not say that my mother predicted what was to happen, yet there was something remarkable in the manner of its taking place. All intercourse between the families had been long broken off; I was going into a foreign country, and only called to pay a hasty visit; and this I should not have thought of, but for a message received just at that crisis, for I had not been invited at any time before. Thus the circumstances were precarious in the highest degree, and the event was as extraordinary. Almost at the first sight of this girl, (for she was then under fourteen,) I was impressed with an affection for her, which never abated or lost its influence a single moment in my heart from that hour. In degree, it actually equalled all that the writers of romance have imagined ; in duration, it was unalterable. I soon lost all sense of religion, and became deaf to the remonstrances of conscience and prudence ; but my regard for her was always the same ; and I may perhaps venture to say, that none of the scenes of misery and wickedness I afterwards experienced, ever banished her a single hour together from my waking thoughts, for the seven following years.

Give me leave, Sir, to reflect a little upon this unexpected incident, and to consider its influence upon my

future life, and how far it was subservient to the views of Divine Providence concerning me: which seem to have been twofold; that by being given up for a while to the consequences of my own wilfulness, and afterwards reclaimed by a high hand, my case, so far as it should be known, might be both a warning and an encouragement to others.

In the first place, hardly any thing less than this violent and commanding passion would have been sufficient to awaken me from the dull melancholy habit I had contracted. I was almost a misanthrope, notwithstanding I so much admired the pictures of virtue and benevolence as drawn by lord Shaftesbury; but now my reluctance to active life was overpowered at once, and I was willing to be or to do any thing which might subserve the accomplishment of my wishes at some future time.

Further, when I afterwards made shipwreck of faith, hope, and conscience, my love to this person was the only remaining principle which in any degree supplied their place; and the bare possibility of seeing her again, was the only present and obvious means of restraining me from the most horrid designs against myself and others.

But then the ill effects it brought upon me counterbalanced these advantages. The interval usually styled *the time of courtship*, is indeed a pleasing part of life, where there is a mutual affection, the consent of friends, a reasonable prospect as to settlement, and the whole is conducted in a prudential manner, and in subordination to the will and fear of God. When things are thus situated, it is a blessing to be susceptive of the tender passions. But when these concomitants are wanting, what we call *love* is the most

tormenting passion in *itself*, and the most destructive in its *consequences*, that can be named. And they were all wanting in my case. I durst not mention it to her friends, or to my own, nor indeed for a considerable time to herself, as I could make no proposals: it remained as a dark fire, locked up in my own breast, which gave me a constant uneasiness. By introducing an idolatrous regard to a creature, it greatly weakened my sense of religion, and made further way for the entrance of infidel principles; and though it seemed to promise great things, as an incentive to diligence and activity in life, in reality it performed nothing. I often formed mighty projects in my mind of what I would willingly do or suffer for the sake of her I loved; yet while I could have her company, I was incapable of forcing myself away, to improve opportunities that offered. Still less could it do in regulating my manners. It did not prevent me from engaging in a long train of excess and riot, utterly unworthy the honourable pretensions I had formed. And though, through the wonderful interposition of Divine Goodness, the maze of my follies was at length unravelled, and my wishes crowned in such a manner as overpaid my sufferings; yet I am sure I would not go through the same series of trouble again, to possess all the treasures of both the Indies. I have enlarged more than I intended on this point, as perhaps these papers may be useful to caution others against indulging an ungovernable passion, by my painful experience. How often may such headstrong votaries be said "to sow the wind, and to "reap the whirlwind!"

My heart being now fixed and riveted to a particular object, I considered every thing I was concerned with in a new light. I concluded it would be abso-

lutely impossible to live at such a distance as Jamaica, for a term of four or five years; and therefore determined, at all events, that I would not go. I could not bear either to acquaint my father with the true reason, or to invent a false one; therefore, without taking any notice to him why I did so, I stayed three weeks, instead of three days, in Kent, till I thought, (as it proved,) the opportunity would be lost, and the ships sailed. I then returned to London. I had highly displeased my father by this disobedience; but he was more easily reconciled than I could have expected. In a little time I sailed with a friend of his to Venice. In this voyage I was exposed to the company and ill example of the common sailors, among whom I ranked. Importunity and opportunity presenting every day, I once more began to relax from the sobriety and order which I had observed, in some degree, for more than two years. I was sometimes pierced with sharp convictions; but though I made a few faint efforts to stop, I never recovered from this declension, as I had done from several before: I did not, indeed, as yet turn out profligate; but I was making large strides towards a total apostasy from God. The most remarkable check and alarm I received, (and, for what I know, the last,) was by a dream, which made a very strong, though not an abiding impression upon my mind.

The consideration of whom I am writing to, renders it needless for me either to enter upon a discussion of the nature of dreams in general, or to make an apology for recording my own. Those who acknowledge Scripture, will allow that there have been monitory and supernatural dreams, evident communications from Heaven, either directing or foretelling future events: and those who are acquainted with the history and ex-

perience of the people of God, are well assured, that such intimations have not been totally withheld in any period down to the present times. Reason, far from contradicting this supposition, strongly pleads for it, where the process of reasoning is rightly understood, and carefully pursued. So that a late eminent writer*, who, I presume, is not generally charged with enthusiasm, undertakes to prove, that the phænomenon of dreaming is inexplicable at least, if not absolutely impossible, without taking in the agency and intervention of spiritual beings, to us invisible. I would refer the incredulous to him. For my own part, I can say, without scruple, "The dream is certain, and the in-"terpretation thereof sure." I am sure I dreamed to the following effect; and I cannot doubt, from what I have seen since, that it had a direct and easy application to my own circumstances, to the dangers in which I was about to plunge myself, and to the unmerited deliverance and mercy which God would be pleased to afford me in the time of my distress.

Though I have wrote out a relation of this dream more than once for others, it has happened that I never reserved a copy; but the principal incidents are so deeply engraven on my memory, that I believe I am not liable to any considerable variations in repeating the account. The scene presented to my imagination was the harbour of Venice, where we had lately been. I thought it was night, and my watch upon the deck; and that, as I was walking to and fro by myself, a person came to me, (I do not remember from whence,) and brought me a ring, with an express charge to keep it carefully; assuring me, that while I preserved that

* Baxter on the *vis inertiæ*

ring, I should be happy and successful; but if I lost or parted with it, I must expect nothing but trouble and misery. I accepted the present and the terms willingly, not in the least doubting my own care to preserve it, and highly satisfied to have my happiness in my own keeping. I was engaged in these thoughts, when a second person came to me, and observing the ring on my finger, took occasion to ask me some questions concerning it. I readily told him its virtues; and his answer expressed a surprise at my weakness, in expecting such effects from a ring. I think he reasoned with me some time upon the impossibility of the thing; and at length urged me, in direct terms, to throw it away. At first I was shocked at the proposal; but his insinuations prevailed. I began to reason and doubt myself; and at last plucked it off my finger, and dropped it over the ship's side into the water: which it had no sooner touched, than I saw, the same instant, a terrible fire burst out from a range of the mountains, (a part of the Alps,) which appeared at some distance behind the city of Venice. I saw the hills as distinct as if awake, and they were all in flames. I perceived too late my folly; and my tempter, with an air of insult, informed me, that all the mercy God had in reserve for me was comprised in that ring, which I had wilfully thrown away. I understood that I must now go with him to the burning mountains; and that all the flames I saw were kindled upon my account. I trembled, and was in a great agony; so that it was surprising I did not then awake: but my dream continued; and when I thought myself upon the point of a constrained departure, and stood self-condemned, without plea or hope, suddenly either a third person, or the same who brought the ring at first, came to me, (I am not certain

which,) and demanded the cause of my grief. I told him the plain case, confessing that I had ruined myself wilfully, and deserved no pity. He blamed my rashness; and asked, if I should be wiser supposing I had my ring again? I could hardly answer to this; for I thought it was gone beyond recall. I believe, indeed, I had not time to answer, before I saw this unexpected friend go down under the water, just in the spot where I had dropped it; and he soon returned, bringing the ring with him. The moment he came on board, the flames in the mountains were extinguished, and my seducer left me. Then was "the prey taken from the "hand of the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered." My fears were at an end, and with joy and gratitude I approached my kind deliverer to receive the ring again: but he refused to return it, and spoke to this affect: "If you should be intrusted with this ring again, you "would very soon bring yourself into the same distress; "you are not able to keep it: but I will preserve it for "you, and, whenever it is needful, will produce it in "your behalf."—Upon this I awoke in a state of mind not to be described: I could hardly eat or sleep, or transact my necessary business, for two or three days. But the impression soon wore off, and in a little time I totally forgot it; and I think it hardly occurred to my mind again, till several years afterwards. It will appear, in the course of these papers, that a time came, when I found myself in circumstances very nearly resembling those suggested by this extraordinary dream, when I stood helpless and hopeless upon the brink of an awful eternity: and I doubt not but, had the eyes of my mind been then opened, I should have seen my grand enemy, who had seduced me wilfully to renounce and cast away my religious profession, and to involve

myself in the most complicated crimes; I say, I should probably have seen him pleased with my agonies, and waiting for a permission to seize and bear away my soul to his place of torment. I should perhaps have seen likewise, that Jesus, whom I had persecuted and defied, rebuking the adversary, challenging me for his own, as a brand plucked out of the fire, and saying, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found "a ransom." However, though I saw not these things, I found the benefit; I obtained mercy. The Lord answered for me in the day of my distress; and, blessed be his name, he who restored the ring, (or what was signified by it,) vouchsafes to keep it. O what an unspeakable comfort is this, that I am not in mine own keeping! "The Lord is my shepherd." I have been enabled to trust my all in his hands; and I know in whom I have believed. Satan still desires to have me, that he might sift me as wheat; but my Saviour has prayed for me, that my faith may not fail. Here is my security and power; a bulwark against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. But for this, many a time and often, (if possible,) I should have ruined myself since my first deliverance; nay, I should fall, and stumble, and perish still, after all that the Lord has done for me, if his faithfulness was not engaged in my behalf, to be my sun and shield even unto death.—"Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

Nothing very remarkable occurred in the following part of that voyage. I returned home December 1743, and soon after repeated my visit to Kent, where I protracted my stay in the same imprudent manner I had done before; which again disappointed my father's designs in my favour, and almost provoked him to disown me. Before any thing suitable offered again,

I was impressed, (owing entirely to my own thoughtless conduct, which was all of a piece,) and put on board a tender: it was at a critical juncture, when the French fleets were hovering upon our coast, so that my father was incapable to procure my release. In a few days I was sent on board the Harwich man of war at the Nore: I entered here upon quite a new scene of life, and endured much hardship for about a month. My father was then willing that I should remain in the navy, as a war was daily expected, and procured me a recommendation to the captain, who took me upon the quarter-deck as a midshipman. I had now an easy life as to externals, and might have gained respect; but my mind was unsettled, and my behaviour very indifferent. I here met with companions who completed the ruin of my principles; and though I affected to talk of virtue, and was not so outwardly abandoned as afterwards, yet my delight and habitual practice was wickedness. My chief intimate was a person of exceeding good natural talents, and much observation; he was the greatest master of what is called *the free-thinking scheme* I remember to have met with, and knew how to insinuate his sentiments in the most plausible way.—And his zeal was equal to his address; he could hardly have laboured more in the cause, if he had expected to gain heaven by it. Allow me to add, while I think of it, that this man, whom I honoured as my master, and whose practice I adopted so eagerly, perished in the same way as I expected to have done. I have been told, that he was overtaken in a voyage from Lisbon with a violent storm; the vessel and people escaped, but a great sea broke on board, and swept him into eternity.—Thus the Lord spares or punishes according to his sovereign pleasure!—But

to return: I was fond of his company; and having myself a smattering of books, was eager enough to show my reading. He soon perceived my case, that I had not wholly broke through the restraints of conscience, and therefore did not shock me at first with too broad intimations of his design; he rather, as I thought, spoke favourably of religion: but when he had gained my confidence, he began to speak plainer; and perceiving my ignorant attachment to the *Characteristics*, he joined issue with me upon that book, and convinced me, that I had never understood it. In a word, he so plied me with objections and arguments, that my depraved heart was soon gained, and I entered into his plan with all my spirit. Thus, like an unwary sailor who quits his port just before a rising storm, I renounced the hopes and comforts of the Gospel at the very time when every other comfort was about to fail me.

In December 1744 the Harwich was in the Downs, bound to the East Indies. The captain gave me liberty to go on shore for a day; but, without consulting prudence, or regarding consequences, I took horse, and, following the dictates of my restless passion, I went to take a last leave of her I loved. I had little satisfaction in the interview, as I was sensible that I was taking pains to multiply my own troubles. The short time I could stay passed like a dream; and on New-year's day 1745 I took my leave, to return to the ship. The captain was prevailed on to excuse my absence; but this rash step, (especially as it was not the first liberty of the kind I had taken,) highly displeased him, and lost me his favour, which I never recovered.

At length we sailed from Spithead with a very large fleet. We put into Torbay with a change of wind; but it returning fair again, we sailed the next day. Se-

veral of our fleet were lost in attempting to leave that place; but the following night the whole fleet was greatly endangered upon the coast of Cornwall, by a storm from the southward. The darkness of the night, and the number of the vessels, occasioned much confusion and damage. Our ship, though several times in imminent danger of being run down by other vessels, escaped unhurt; but many suffered much, particularly the Admiral. This occasioned our putting back to Plymouth.

While we lay at Plymouth, I heard that my father, who had interest in some of the ships lately lost, was come down to Torbay. He had a connexion at that time with the African company. I thought, if I could get to him, he might easily introduce me into that service, which would be better than pursuing a long uncertain voyage to the East Indies. It was a maxim with me in those unhappy days, *Never to deliberate;* the thought hardly occurred to me, but I was resolved to leave the ship at all events: I did so, and in the wrongest manner possible. I was sent one day in the boat, to take care that none of the people deserted; but I betrayed my trust, and went off myself. I knew not what road to take, and durst not ask, for fear of being suspected; yet having some general idea of the country, I guessed right; and when I had travelled some miles, I found, upon inquiry, that I was on the road to Dartmouth. All went smoothly that day, and part of the next; I walked apace; and expected to have been with my father in about two hours, when I was met by a small party of soldiers. I could not avoid or deceive them. They brought me back to Plymouth; I walked through the streets guarded like a felon—My heart was full of indignation, shame, and

fear.——I was confined two days in the guard house, then sent on board my ship, kept a while in irons, then publicly stripped and whipped; after which I was degraded from my office, and all my former companions forbidden to show me the least favour, or even to speak to me.——As midshipman I had been entitled to some command, which, (being sufficiently haughty and vain,) I had not been backward to exert.——I was now in my turn brought down to a level with the lowest, and exposed to the insults of all.

And as my present situation was uncomfortable, my future prospects were still worse; the evils I suffered were likely to grow heavier every day. While my catastrophe was recent, the officers, and my quondam brethren, were something disposed to screen me from ill usage; but during the little time I remained with them afterwards, I found them cool very fast in their endeavours to protect me. Indeed they could not avoid it, without running a great risk of sharing with me; for the captain, though in general a humane man, who behaved very well to the ship's company, was almost implacable in his resentment when he had been greatly offended, and took several occasions to show himself so to me; and the voyage was expected to be, (as it proved,) for five years. Yet I think nothing I either felt or feared distressed me so much as to see myself thus forcibly torn away from the object of my affections, under a great improbability of seeing her again, and a much greater of returning in such a manner as would give me hopes of seeing her mine. Thus I was as miserable on all hands as could well be imagined. My breast was filled with the most excruciating passions, eager desire, bitter rage, and black despair.—Every hour exposed me to some new insult and hard-

ship, with no hope of relief or mitigation : no friend to take my part, or to listen to my complaint. Whether I looked inward or outward, I could perceive nothing but darkness and misery. I think no case, except that of a conscience wounded by the wrath of God, could be more dreadful than mine : I cannot express with what wishfulness and regret I cast my last looks upon the English shore ; I kept my eyes fixed upon it, till the ship's distance increasing, it insensibly disappeared ; and when I could see it no longer, I was tempted to throw myself into the sea, which, (according to the wicked system I had adopted,) would put a period to all my sorrows at once. But the secret hand of God restrained me. Help me to praise him, dear Sir, for his wonderful goodness to the most unworthy of all his creatures.

January 15, 1763. I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

Dear Sir,

THOUGH I desired your instructions as to the manner and extent of these memoirs, I began to write before I received them, and had almost finished the preceding sheet when your favour of the 11th came to hand. I shall find another occasion to acknowledge my sense of your kind expressions of friendship, which I pray the Lord I may never give you cause to repent or withdraw : at present I shall confine myself to what more particularly relates to the task assigned me. I shall obey you, Sir, in taking notice of the little incidents you recall to my memory, and of others of the

like nature, which, without your direction, I should have thought too trivial, and too much my own to deserve mentioning. When I began the eight letters, I intended to say no more of myself than might be necessary to illustrate the wonders of divine providence and grace in the leading turns of my life; but I account your judgment a sufficient warrant for enlarging my plan.

Amongst other things, you desired a more explicit account of the state and progress of my courtship, as it is usually phrased. This was the point in which I thought it especially became me to be very brief; but I submit to you; and this seems a proper place to resume it, by telling you how it stood at the time of my leaving England. When my inclinations first discovered themselves, both parties were so young, that no one but myself considered it in a serious view. It served for tea-table talk amongst our friends; and nothing further was expected from it. But afterwards, when my passion seemed to have abiding effects, so that in an interval of two years it was not at all abated, and especially as it occasioned me to act without any regard to prudence or interest, or my father's designs; and as there was a coolness between him and the family, her parents began to consider it as a matter of consequence; and when I took my last leave of them, her mother, at the same time she expressed the most tender affection for me, as if I had been her own child, told me that though she had no objections to make, upon a supposition, that at a maturer age there should be a probability of our engaging upon a prudent prospect; yet as things then stood, she thought herself obliged to interfere; and therefore desired I would no more think of returning to their house, unless her daughter was from home,

till such time as I could either prevail with myself entirely to give up my pretensions, or could assure her that I had my father's express consent to go on. Much depended on Mrs. N*****'s part in this affair; it was something difficult; but though she was young, gay, and quite unpractised in such matters, she was directed to a happy medium. A positive encouragement, or an absolute refusal, would have been attended with equal, though different disadvantages. But without much studying about it, I found her always upon her guard: she had penetration to see her absolute power over me, and prudence to make a proper use of it; she would neither understand my hints, nor give me room to come to a direct explanation. She has said since, that from the first discovery of my regard, and long before the thought was agreeable to her, she had often an unaccountable impression upon her mind, that sooner or later she should be mine. Upon these terms we parted.

I now return to my voyage.—During our passage to Madeira, I was a prey to the most gloomy thoughts. Though I had well deserved all I met with, and the captain might have been justified if he had carried his resentment still further; yet my pride at that time suggested that I had been grossly injured: and this so far wrought upon my wicked heart, that I actually formed designs against his life; and this was one reason that made me willing to prolong my own. I was sometimes divided between the two, not thinking it practicable to effect both. The Lord had now to appearance given me up to judicial hardness; I was capable of any thing. I had not the least fear of God before my eyes, nor, (so far as I remember,) the least sensibility of conscience. I was possessed of so strong a spirit of delusion, that I believed my own lie, and was firmly per-

suaded, that after death I should cease to be.—Yet the Lord preserved me!—Some intervals of sober reflection would at times take place: when I have chosen death rather than life, a ray of hope would come in, (though there was little probability for such a hope,) that I should yet see better days; that I might again return to England, and have my wishes crowned, if I did not wilfully throw myself away. In a word, my love to Mrs. N***** was now the only restraint I had left. Though I neither feared God, nor regarded men, I could not bear that *she* should think meanly of me when I was dead. As in the outward concerns of life, the weakest means are often employed by Divine Providence to produce great effects, beyond their common influence, (as when a disease, for instance, has been removed by a fright,) so I found it then: this single thought, which had not restrained me from a thousand smaller evils, proved my only and effectual barrier against the greatest and most fatal temptations. How long I could have supported this conflict, or what, humanly speaking, would have been the consequence of my continuing in that situation, I cannot say; but the Lord, whom I little thought of, knew my danger, and was providing for my deliverance.

Two things I had determined when at Plymouth; that I would *not* go to India, and that I *would* go to Guinea; and such indeed was the Lord's will concerning me; but they were to be accomplished in his way, not in my own. We had been now at Madeira some time; the business of the fleet was completed, and we were to sail the following day. On that memorable morning I was late in bed, and had slept longer, but that one of the midshipmen, (an old companion,) came down, and, between jest and earnest, bid me rise: and

as I did not immediately comply he cut down the hammock, or bed, in which I lay; which forced me to dress myself. I was very angry, but durst not resent it. I was little aware how much his caprice affected me; and that this person, who had no design in what he did, was the messenger of God's providence. I said little, but went upon deck; where I that moment saw a man putting his clothes into a boat, who told me he was going to leave us. Upon inquiring, I was informed, that two men, from the Guinea ship, which lay near us, had entered on board the Harwich, and that the commodore, (the present Sir George Pocock,) had ordered the captain to send two others in their room. My heart instantly burned like fire.——I begged the boat might be detained a few minutes; I ran to the lieutenants, and entreated them to intercede with the captain that I might be dismissed. Upon this occasion, though I had been formerly upon ill terms with these officers, and had disobliged them all in their turns; yet they had pitied my case, and were ready to serve me now. The captain, who, when we were at Plymouth, had refused to exchange me, though at the request of Admiral Medley, was now easily prevailed on. I believe, in little more than half an hour from my being asleep in my bed, I saw myself discharged, and safe on board another ship. This was one of the many critical turns of life, in which the Lord was pleased to display his providence and care, by causing many unexpected circumstances to concur in almost an instant of time. These sudden opportunities were several times repeated; each of them brought me into an entire new scene of action, and they were usually delayed to almost the last moment in which they could have taken place.

The ship I went on board was bound to Sierra Leone,

and the adjacent parts of what is called *the Windward Coast of Africa.* The commander, I found, was acquainted with my father; he received me very kindly, and made fair professions of assistance; and I believe he would have been my friend: but without making the least advantage of former mistakes and troubles, I pursued the same course; nay, if possible, I acted much worse. On board the Harwich, though my principles were totally corrupted, yet, as upon my first going there I was in some degree staid and serious, the remembrance of this made me ashamed of breaking out in that notorious manner I could otherwise have indulged. But now, entering amongst strangers, I could appear without disguise; and I well remember, that while I was passing from the one ship to the other, this was one reason why I rejoiced in the exchange, and one reflection I made upon the occasion, viz. "That "I now might be as abandoned as I pleased, without "any control;" and from this time I was exceedingly vile indeed, little if any thing short of that animated description of an almost irrecoverable state, which we have in 2 Pet. ii. 14. I not only sinned with a high hand myself, but made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion; nay, I eagerly sought occasion, sometimes to my own hazard and hurt. One natural consequence of this carriage was, a loss of the favour of my new captain; not that he was at all religious, or disliked my wickedness any further than it affected his interest, but I became careless and disobedient: I did not please him, because I did not intend it; and as he was a man of an odd temper likewise, we the more easily disagreed. Besides, I had a little of that unlucky wit, which can do little more than multiply troubles and enemies to its possessor; and, upon

some imagined affront, I made a song, in which I ridiculed his ship, his designs, and his person, and soon taught it to the whole ship's company. Such was the ungrateful return I made for his offers of friendship and protection. I had mentioned no names; but the allusion was plain; and he was no stranger either to the intention or the author.——I shall say no more of this part of my story; let it be buried in eternal silence.——But let me not be silent from the praise of that grace which could pardon, that blood which could expiate, such sins as mine: Yea, "the Ethiopian "may change his skin, and the leopard his spots," since I, who was the willing slave of every evil, possessed with a legion of unclean spirits, have been spared, and saved, and changed, to stand as a monument of his almighty power for ever.

Thus I went on for about six months, by which time the ship was preparing to leave the coast. A few days before she sailed, the captain died. I was not upon much better terms with his mate, who now succeeded to the command, and had, upon some occasion, treated me ill. I made no doubt but if I went with him to the West-Indies, he would put me on board a man of war; and this, from what I had known already, was more dreadful to me than death. To avoid it, I determined to remain in Africa; and amused myself, with many golden dreams that here I should find an opportunity of improving my fortune.

There are still upon that part of the coast a few white men settled, (and there were many more at the time I was first there,) whose business it was to purchase slaves, &c. in the rivers and country adjacent, and sell them to the ships at an advanced price. One of these, who at first landed in my indigent circum-

stances, had acquired considerable wealth: he had lately been in England, and was returning in the vessel I was in, of which he owned a quarter part. His example impressed me with hopes of the same success; and, upon condition of entering into his service, I obtained my discharge. I had not the precaution to make any terms, but trusted to his generosity. I received no compensation for my time on board the ship, but a bill upon the owners in England; which was never paid, for they failed before my return. The day the vessel sailed, I landed upon the island of Benanoes, with little more than the clothes upon my back, as if I had escaped shipwreck.

January 17, 1763. I am, &c.

LETTER V.

Dear Sir,

THERE seems an important instruction, and of frequent use, in these words of our dear Lord, "Mine hour is not yet come." The two following years, of which I am now to give some account, will seem as an absolute blank in a very short life: but as the Lord's hour of grace was not yet come, I was to have still deeper experience of the dreadful state of the heart of man when left to itself. I have seen frequent cause since to admire the mercy of the Lord, in banishing me to those distant parts, and almost excluding me from human society, at a time when I was big with mischief, and like one infected with the pestilence, was capable of spreading a taint wherever I went. Had my affairs taken a different turn; had I succeeded in my designs,

and remained in England, my sad story would probably have been worse. Worse in myself, indeed, I could have hardly been; but my wickedness would have had greater scope; I might have been very hurtful to others, and multiplied irreparable evils. But the Lord wisely placed me where I could do little harm. The few I had to converse with, were too much like myself, and I was soon brought into such abject circumstances, that I was too low to have any influence. I was rather shunned and despised than imitated; there being few, even of the negroes themselves, (during the first year of my residence among them,) but thought themselves too good to speak to me. I was as yet an "outcast lying in my blood," (Ezek. xvi.) and, to all appearance, exposed to perish.——But the Lord beheld me with mercy,—he did not strike me to hell, as I justly deserved; "he passed by me when I was in "my blood, and said unto me, Live." But the appointed time for the manifestation of his love, to cover all my iniquities with the robe of his righteousness, and to admit me to the privileges of his children, was not till long afterwards: yet even now he bid me *live;* and I can only ascribe it to his secret upholding power, that what I suffered in a part of this interval, did not bereave me either of my life or senses; yet, as by these sufferings the force of my evil example and inclinations was lessened, I have reason to account them amongst my mercies.

It may not, perhaps, be amiss to digress for a few lines, and give you a very brief sketch of the geography of the circuit I was now confined to; especially as I may have frequent occasion to refer to places I shall now mention: for my trade afterwards, when the Lord gave me to see better days, was chiefly to the same

places, and with the same persons, where and by whom I had been considered as upon a level with their meanest slaves. From Cape de Verd, the most western point of Africa, to Cape Mount, the whole coast is full of rivers: the principle are, Gambio, Rio Grande, Sierra Leone, and Sherbro. Of the former, as it is well known, and I was never there, I need say nothing. The Rio Grande, (like the Nile,) divides into many branches near the sea. On the most northerly, called *Cacheo*, the Portuguese have a settlement. The most southern branch, known by the name of *Rio Nuna*, is, or then was, the usual boundary of the white men's trade northward. Sierra Leone is a mountainous peninsula, uninhabited, and, I believe, inaccessible, upon account of the thick woods, excepting those parts which lie near the water. The river is large and navigable. From hence, about twelve leagues to the south-east, are three contiguous islands, called the *Benanoes*, about twenty miles in circuit; this was about the centre of the white men's residence. Seven leagues further, the same way, lie the *Plantanes*, three small islands, two miles distant from the continent at the point, which form one side of the Sherbro. This river is more properly a *sound*, running within a long island, and receiving the confluence of several large rivers, "*rivers unknown to song*," but far more deeply engraven in my remembrance than the Po or Tyber. The southernmost of these has a very peculiar course, almost parallel to the coast; so that, in tracing it a great many leagues upwards, it will seldom lead one above three miles, and sometimes not more than half a mile from the seashore. Indeed I know not but that all these rivers may have communications with each other, and with the sea in many places, which I have not remarked.

If you cast your eyes upon a large map of Africa while you are reading this, you will have a general idea of the country I was in; for though the maps are very incorrect, most of the places I have mentioned are inserted, and in the same order as I have named them.

My new master had formerly resided near Cape Mount, but now he settled at the Plantanes, upon the largest of the three islands. It is a low sandy island, about two miles in circumference, and almost covered with palm-trees. We immediately began to build a house, and to enter upon trade. I had now some desire to retrieve my lost time, and to exert diligence in what was before me; and he was a man with whom I might have lived tolerably well, if he had not been soon influenced against me: but he was much under the direction of a black woman, who lived with him as a wife. She was a person of some consequence in her own country, and he owed his first rise to her interest. This woman, (I know not for what reason,) was strangely prejudiced against me from the first; and what made it still worse for me, was a severe fit of illness, which attacked me very soon, before I had opportunity to show what I could or would do in his service. I was sick when he sailed in a shallop to Rio Nuna, and he left me in her hands. At first I was taken some care of; but as I did not recover very soon, she grew weary, and entirely neglected me. I had sometimes not a little difficulty to procure a draught of cold water when burning with a fever. My bed was a mat spread upon a board or chest, and a log of wood my pillow. When my fever left me, and my appetite returned, I would gladly have eaten, but there was no one gave unto me. She lived in plenty herself, but hardly allowed me sufficient to sustain life, except now and

then, when, in the highest good humour, she would send me victuals in her own plate after she had dined; and this, (so greatly was my pride humbled,) I received with thanks and eagerness, as the most needy beggar does an alms. Once, I well remember, I was called to receive this bounty from her own hand; but being exceedingly weak and feeble, I dropped the plate. Those who live in plenty can hardly conceive how this loss touched me; but she had the cruelty to laugh at my disappointment; and though the table was covered with dishes, (for she lived much in the European manner,) she refused to give me any more. My distress has been at times so great, as to compel me to go by night, and pull up roots in the plantation, (though at the risk of being punished as a thief,) which I have eaten raw upon the spot, for fear of discovery. The roots I speak of are very wholesome food, when boiled or roasted; but as unfit to be eaten raw in any quantity as a potatoe. The consequence of this diet, which, after the first experiment, I always expected, and seldom missed, was the same as if I had taken *tartar emetic;* so that I have often returned as empty as I went; yet necessity urged me to repeat the trial several times. I have sometimes been relieved by strangers; nay, even by the slaves in the chain, who have secretly brought me victuals, (for they durst not be seen to do it,) from their own slender pittance. Next to pressing want, nothing sits harder upon the mind than *scorn* and *contempt;* and of this likewise I had an abundant measure. When I was very slowly recovering, this woman would sometimes pay me a visit, not to pity or relieve, but to insult me. She would call me worthless and indolent, and compel me to walk; which, when I could hardly do, she would set her attendants to mimic my motion,

to clap their hands, laugh, throw limes at me; or, if they chose to throw stones, (as I think was the case once or twice,) they were not rebuked: but, in general, though all who depended on her favour must join in her treatment, yet, when she was out of sight, I was rather pitied than scorned by the meanest of her slaves. At length my master returned from his voyage. I complained of ill usage; but he could not believe me: and as I did it in her hearing, I fared no better for it. But in his second voyage he took me with him. We did pretty well for a while, till a brother-trader he met in the river persuaded him that I was unfaithful, and stole his goods in the night, or when he was on shore. This was almost the only vice I could not be justly charged with: the only remains of a good education I could boast of, was what is commonly called *honesty;* and, as far as he had intrusted me, I had been always true; and though my great distress might, in some measure, have excused it, I never once thought of defrauding him in the smallest matter. However, the charge was believed, and I condemned without evidence. From that time *he* likewise used me very hardly: whenever he left the vessel, I was locked upon deck, with a pint of rice for my day's allowance; and, if he staid longer, I had no relief till his return. Indeed, I believe I should have been nearly starved, but for an opportunity of catching fish sometimes. When fowls were killed for his own use, I seldom was allowed any part but the entrails to bait my hooks with: and at what we call *slack water*, that is, about the changing of the tides, when the current was still, I used generally to fish, (for at other times it was not practicable,) and I very often succeeded. If I saw a fish upon my hook, my joy was little less than any other person may have found in the

accomplishment of the scheme he had most at heart. Such a fish, hastily broiled, or rather half burnt, without sauce, salt, or bread, has afforded me a delicious meal. If I caught none, I might, (if I could,) sleep away my hunger till the next return of slack water, and then try again. Nor did I suffer less from the inclemency of the weather, and the want of clothes. The rainy season was now advancing; my whole suit was a shirt, a pair of trowsers, a cotton handkerchief instead of a cap, and a cotton cloth, about two yards long, to supply the want of upper garments: and, thus accoutred, I have been exposed for twenty, thirty, perhaps near forty hours together, in incessant rains, accompanied with strong gales of wind, without the least shelter, when my master was on shore. I feel to this day some faint returns of the violent pains I then contracted. The excessive cold and wet I endured in that voyage, and so soon after I had recovered from a long sickness, quite broke my constitution, and my spirits. The latter were soon restored; but the effects of the former still remain with me, as a needful *memento* of the service and wages of sin.

In about two months we returned; and then the rest of the time I remained with him was chiefly spent at the Plantanes, under the same regimen as I have already mentioned. My haughty heart was now brought down; not to a wholesome repentance, not to the language of the prodigal; this was far from me; but my spirits were sunk; I lost all resolution, and almost all reflection. I had lost the fierceness which fired me when on board the Harwich, and which made me capable of the most desperate attempts; but I was no further changed than a tyger tamed by hunger;—remove the occasion, and he will be as wild as ever.

One thing, though strange, is most true. Though destitute of food and clothing, depressed to a degree beyond common wretchedness, I could sometimes collect my mind to mathematical studies. I had bought *Barrow's Euclid* at Plymouth; it was the only volume I brought on shore; it was always with me, and I used to take it to remote corners of the island by the sea-side, and draw my *diagrams* with a long stick upon the sand. Thus I often beguiled my sorrows, and almost forgot my feeling;—and thus, without any other assistance, I made myself in a good measure master of the first six books of *Euclid.*

January 17, 1763. I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

Dear Sir,

THERE is much piety and spirit in the grateful acknowledgment of Jacob, "With my staff I passed "over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." These are words which ought to affect me with a peculiar emotion. I remember that, some of those mournful days to which my last letter refers, I was busied in planting *lime* or *lemon trees.* The plants I put in the ground were no longer than a young gooseberry-bush: my master and his mistress passing by my place, stopped a while to look at me: at last, "Who knows," says he, "who knows but by the time these trees grow up and "bear, you may go home to England, obtain the com-"mand of a ship, and return to reap the fruit of your "labours? We see strange things sometimes happen." This, as he intended it, was a cutting sarcasm. I be-

lieve he thought it full as probable that I should live to be king of Poland. Yet it proved a prediction, and they, (one of them at least,) lived to see me return from England, in the capacity he had mentioned, and pluck some of the first limes from those very trees. How can I proceed in my relation, till I raise a monument to the divine goodness, by comparing the circumstances in which the Lord has since placed me, with what I was at that time! Had you seen me, Sir, then go so pensive and solitary, in the dead of night, to wash my one shirt upon the rocks, and afterwards, put it on wet that it might dry upon my back while I slept; had you seen me so poor a figure, that when a ship's boat came to the island, shame often constrained me to hide myself in the woods from the sight of strangers; especially had you known that my conduct, principles, and heart, were still darker than my outward condition; how little would you have imagined that one who so fully answered to the στυγητοι και μισουντες* of the apostle, was reserved to be so peculiar an instance of the providential care and exuberant goodness of God. There was at that time but one earnest desire in my heart which was not contrary and shocking both to religion and reason: that *one* desire, though my vile licentious life rendered me peculiarly unworthy of success, and though a thousand difficulties seemed to render it impossible, the Lord was pleased to gratify. But this favour, though great, and greatly prized, was a small thing, compared to the blessings of his grace: he spared me, to give me "the knowledge of himself in the person of Jesus "Christ." In love to my soul, he delivered me from the pit of corruption, and cast all my aggravated sins

* Hateful, and hating one another.

behind his back. He brought my feet into the paths of peace.——This is indeed the chief article, but it is not the whole. When he made me acceptable to himself in the Beloved, he gave me favour in the sight of others. He raised me new friends, protected and guided me through a long series of dangers, and crowned every day with repeated mercies. To him I owe it that I am still alive, and that I am not still living in hunger and in thirst, and in nakedness, and the want of all things: into that state I brought myself: but it was He delivered me. He has given me an easy situation in life, some experimental knowledge of his gospel, a large acquaintance amongst his people, a friendship and correspondence with several of his most honoured servants.—But it is as difficult to enumerate my present advantages, as it is fully to describe the evils and miseries of the preceding contrast.

I know not exactly how long things continued with me thus, but I believe near a twelvemonth. In this interval I wrote two or three times to my father: I gave him an account of my condition, and desired his assistance; intimating, at the same time, that I had resolved not to return to England unless he was pleased to send to me. I have likewise by me letters wrote to Mrs. N**** in that dismal period; so that at the lowest ebb, it seems I still retained a hope of seeing her again. My father applied to his friend in Liverpool, of whom I have spoken before; who gave orders accordingly to a captain of his, who was then fitting out for Gambia and Sierra Leone.

Sometime within the year, as I have said, I obtained my master's consent to live with another trader, who dwelt upon the same island. Without his consent I could not be taken; and he was unwilling to do it

sooner; but it was then brought about. This was an alteration much to my advantage: I was soon decently clothed, lived in plenty, was considered as a companion, and trusted with the care of all his domestic effects, which were to the amount of some thousand pounds. This man had several factories, and white servants, in different places; particularly one in Kittam, the river I spoke of, which runs so near along the sea-coast. I was soon appointed to go there, where I had a share in the management of business, jointly with another of his servants. We lived as we pleased, business flourished, and our employer was satisfied. Here I began to be wretch enough to think myself *happy*. There is a significant phrase frequently used in those parts, That such a white man is grown *black*. It does not intend an alteration of complexion, but disposition. I have known several, who, settling in Africa after the age of thirty or forty, have, at that time of life, been gradually assimilated to the tempers, customs, and ceremonies, of the natives, so far as to prefer that country to England: they have even become dupes to all the pretended charms, necromancies, amulets, and divinations of the blinded negroes, and put more trust in such things than the wiser sort among the natives. A part of this spirit of infatuation was growing upon me, (in time perhaps I might have yielded to the whole;) I entered into closer engagements with the inhabitants; and should have lived and died a wretch amongst them, if the Lord had not watched over me for good. Not that I had lost those ideas which chiefly engaged my heart to England, but despair of seeing them accomplished made me willing to remain where I was. I thought I could more easily bear the disappointment in this situation than nearer home. But so soon as I had fixed my connec-

tions and plans with these views, the Lord providentially interposed to break them in pieces, and save me from ruin in spite of myself.

In the mean time, the ship that had orders to bring me home arrived at Sierra Leone. The captain made inquiry for me there, and at the Benanoes; but understanding that I was at a great distance in the country, he thought no more about me. Without doubt, the hand of God directed my being placed at Kittam just at this time; for as the ship came no nearer than the Benanoes, and staid but a few days, if I had been at the Plantanes, I could not perhaps have heard of her till she had been sailed. The same must have certainly been the event had I been sent to any other factory, of which my new master had several upon different rivers. But though the place I was at was a long way up a river, much more than a hundred miles distance from the Plantanes; yet, by the peculiar situation which I have already noticed, I was still within a mile of the sea-coast. To make the interposition more remarkable, I was at that very juncture going in quest of trade, to a place at some distance directly from the sea; and should have set out a day or two before, but that we waited for a few articles from the next ship that offered, to complete the assortment of goods I was to take with me. We used sometimes to walk on the beach, in expectation of seeing a vessel pass by; but this was very precarious, as at that time the place was not at all resorted to by ships for trade. Many passed in the night, others kept at a considerable distance from the shore. In a word, I do not know that any one had stopped while I was there, though some had before, upon observing a signal made from the shore. In February 1747, (I know not the exact day,) my fellow-servant

walking down to the beach in the forenoon, saw a vessel sailing past, and made a smoke in token of trade. She was already a little beyond the place; and as the wind was fair, the captain was in some demur whether to stop or not. However, had my companion been half an hour later, she would have been gone beyond recall; but he soon saw her come to an anchor, and went on board in a canoe; and this proved the very ship I have spoken of. One of the first questions he was asked was concerning me; and when the captain understood I was so near, he came on shore to deliver his message. Had an invitation from home reached me when I was sick and starving at the Plantanes, I should have received it as life from the dead; but now, for the reasons already given, I heard it at first with indifference. The captain, unwilling to lose me, told a story altogether of his own framing: he gave me a very plausible account how he had missed a large packet of letters and papers which he should have brought with him; but this, he said, he was sure of, having had it from my father's own mouth, as well as from his employer, that a person lately dead had left me £400 *per annum;* adding further, that if I was any way embarrassed in my circumstances, he had express orders to redeem me, though it should cost one half of his cargo. Every particular of this was false; nor could I myself believe what he said about the estate; but as I had some expectations from an aged relation, I thought a part of it might be true. But I was not long in suspense: for though my father's care and desire to see me had too little weight with me, and would have been insufficient to make me quit my retreat; yet the remembrance of Mrs. N*****, the hopes of seeing her, and the possibility that accepting this offer might

once more put me in a way of gaining her hand, prevailed over all other considerations. The captain further promised, (and in this he kept his word,) that I should lodge in his cabin, dine at his table, and be his constant companion, without expecting any service from me. And thus I was suddenly freed from a captivity of about fifteen months. I had neither a thought nor a desire of this change one hour before it took place. I embarked with him, and in a few hours lost sight of Kittam.

How much is their blindness to be pitied, who can see nothing but chance in events of this sort! so blind and stupid was I at that time: I made no reflection, I sought no direction in what had happened: like a wave of the sea driven with the wind, and tossed, I was governed by present appearances, and looked no further. But he who is eyes to the blind, was leading me in a way that I knew not.

Now I am in some measure enlightened, I can easily perceive, that it is in the adjustment and concurrence of these seemingly fortuitous circumstances, that the ruling power and wisdom of God is most evidently displayed in human affairs. How many such casual events may we remark in the history of Joseph, which had each a necessary influence on his ensuing promotion! If he had not dreamed, or if he had not told his dream; if the Midianites had passed by a day sooner, or a day later; if they had sold him to any person but Potiphar; if his mistress had been a better woman; if Pharaoh's officers had not displeased their lord; or if any or all these things had fell out in any other manner or time than they did;—all that followed had been prevented; the promises and purposes of God concerning Israel, their bondage, deliverance, polity, and settlement, must

have failed: and as all these things tended to and centred in Christ, the promised Saviour, the desire of all nations would not have appeared. Mankind had been still in their sins, without hope, and the counsels of God's eternal love in favour of sinners defeated. Thus we may see a connexion between Joseph's first dream and the death of our Lord Christ, with all its glorious consequences. So strong, though secret, is the concatenation between the *greatest* and the *smallest* events. What a comfortable thought is this to a believer, to know, that amidst all the various interfering designs of men, the Lord has one constant design, which he cannot, will not miss, namely, his own glory in the complete salvation of his people; and that he is wise, and strong, and faithful, to make even those things which seem contrary to this design, subservient to promote it? You have allowed me to comment upon my own text; yet the length of this observation may need some apology. Believe me to be, with great respect, &c.

January 18, 1763.

LETTER VII.

Dear Sir,

THE ship I was now on board as a passenger, was on a trading voyage for gold, ivory, dyers wood, and bees-wax. It requires much longer time to collect a cargo of this sort than of slaves. The captain began his trade at Gambia, had been already four or five months in Africa, and continued there a year, or thereabouts, after I was with him; in which time he ranged the whole coast as far as Cape Lopez, which lies about a degree south of the equinoctial, and more than a

thousand miles further from England than the place where I embarked. I have little to offer worthy your notice in the course of this tedious voyage. I had no business to employ my thoughts, but sometimes amused myself with mathematics: excepting this, my whole life, when awake, was a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness. I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer: not content with common oaths and imprecations, I daily invented new ones; so that I was often seriously reproved by the captain, who was himself a very passionate man, and not at all circumspect in his expressions. From the relation I at times made him of my past adventures, and what he saw of my conduct, and especially towards the close of the voyage, when we met with many disasters, he would often tell me, that, to his great grief, he had a Jonah on board; that a curse attended me wherever I went; and that all the troubles he met with in the voyage were owing to his having taken me into the vessel. I shall omit any further particulars, and after mentioning an instance or two of the Lord's mercy to me, while I was thus defying his power and patience, I shall proceed to something more worthy your perusal.

Although I lived long in the excess of almost every other extravagance, I never was fond of drinking: and my father has often been heard to say, that while I avoided drunkenness, he should still entertain hopes of my recovery. But sometimes I would promote a drinking-bout, for a frolic sake, as I termed it; for though I did not love the liquor, I was sold to do iniquity, and delighted in mischief. The last abominable frolic of this sort I engaged in was in the river Gabon; the proposal and expense were my own. Four or five of us one evening sat down upon deck, to see who could hold

out longest in drinking geneva and rum alternately: a large sea-shell supplied the place of a glass. I was very unfit for a challenge of this sort; for my head was always incapable of bearing much strong drink. However, I began, and proposed the first toast, which I well remember was some imprecation against the person who should *start* first. This proved to be myself. My brain was soon fired. I arose, and danced about the deck like a madman; and while I was thus diverting my companions, my hat went overboard.—By the light of the moon, I saw the ship's boat, and eagerly threw myslf over the side to get into her, that I might recover my hat. My sight in that circumstance deceived me; for the boat was not within my reach, as I thought, but perhaps twenty feet from the ship's side. I was, however half overboard, and should in one moment more have plunged myself into the water, when somebody caught hold of my clothes behind, and pulled me back. This was an amazing escape: for I could not swim, if I had been sober; the tide ran very strong; my companions were too much intoxicated to save me; and the rest of the ship's company were asleep. So near was I to appearance of perishing in that dreadful condition, and sinking into eternity under the weight of my own curse.

Another time, at Cape Lopez, some of us had been in the woods, and shot a buffalo, or wild cow; we brought a part of it on board, and carefully marked the place, (as I thought,) where we left the remainder. In the evening we returned to fetch it; but we set out too late. I undertook to be the guide; but night coming on before we could reach the place, we lost our way. Sometimes we were in swamps, up to the middle in water; and when we recovered dry land, we

could not tell whether we were walking towards the ship, or wandering further from her. Every step increased our uncertainty. The night grew darker, and we were entangled in inextricable woods, where perhaps the foot of man had never trod before. That part of the country is entirely abandoned to wild beasts, with which it prodigiously abounds. We were indeed in a terrible case, having neither light, food, nor arms, and expecting a tiger to rush from behind every tree. The stars were clouded, and we had no compass, to form a judgment which way we were going. Had things continued thus, we had probably perished; but it pleased God no beast came near us; and, after some hours perplexity, the moon arose, and pointed out the eastern quarter. It appeared, then, as we had expected, that instead of drawing nearer to the sea-side, we had been penetrating into the country, but by the guidance of the moon, we at length came to the water-side, a considerable distance from the ship. We got safe on board, without any other inconvenience than what we suffered from fear and fatigue.

Those, and many other deliverances, were all at that time entirely lost upon me. The admonitions of conscience, which, from successive repulses, had grown weaker and weaker, at length entirely ceased; and for a space of many months, if not for some years, I cannot recollect that I had a single check of that sort. At times I had been visited with sickness, and have believed myself near to death; but I had not the least concern about the consequences. In a word, I seemed to have every mark of final impenitence and rejection; neither judgments nor mercies made the least impression on me.

At length, our business finished, we left Cape Lopez,

and, after a few days stay at the island of Annabona, to lay in provisions, we sailed homewards about the beginning of January, 1748. From Annabona to England, without touching at any intermediate port, is a very long navigation, perhaps more than seven thousand miles, if we include the circuit necessary to be made on account of the trade-winds. We sailed first westward, till near the coast of Brazil, then northwards, to the banks of Newfoundland, with the usual variations of wind and weather, and without meeting any thing extraordinary. On these banks we stopped half a day to fish for cod: this was then chiefly for diversion; we had provisions enough, and little expected those fish, (as it afterwards proved,) would be all we should have to subsist on. We left the banks March 1, with a hard gale of wind westerly, which pushed us fast homewards. I should here observe, that, with the length of this voyage in a hot climate, the vessel was greatly out of repair, and very unfit to support stormy weather; the sails and cordage were likewise very much worn out, and many such circumstances concurred to render what followed more dangerous. I think it was on the 9th of March, the day before our catastrophe, that I felt a thought pass through my mind, which I had long been a stranger to. Among the few books we had on board, one was Stanhope's *Thomas à Kempis:* I carelessly took it up, as I had often done before, to pass away the time; but I had still read it with the same indifference as if it was entirely romance. However, while I was reading this time, an involuntary suggestion arose in my mind. What if these things should be true? I could not bear the force of the inference, as it related to myself, and therefore shut the book presently. My conscience wit-

nessed against me once more; and I concluded, that, true or false, I must abide the consequences of my own choice. I put an abrupt end to these reflections, by joining in with some vain conversation or other that came in the way.

But now *the Lord's time was come*, and the conviction I was so unwilling to receive, was deeply impressed upon me, by an awful dispensation. I went to bed that night in my usual security and indifference; but was awaked from a sound sleep by the force of a violent sea, which broke on board us. So much of it came down below as filled the cabin I lay in with water. This alarm was followed by a cry from the deck, that the ship was going down, or sinking. As soon as I could recover myself, I essayed to go upon deck; but was met upon the ladder by the captain, who desired me to bring a knife with me. While I returned for the knife, another person went up in my room, who was instantly washed overboard. We had no leisure to lament him: nor did we expect to survive him long; for we soon found the ship was filling with water very fast. The sea had torn away the upper timbers on one side, and made the ship a mere wreck in a few minutes. I shall not affect to describe this disaster in the marine dialect, which would be understood by few; and therefore I can give you but a very inadequate idea of it. Taking in all circumstances, it was astonishing, and almost miraculous, that any of us survived to relate the story. We had immediate recourse to the pumps; but the water increased against all our efforts: some of us were set to *bailing* in another part of the vessel, that is, to lade it out with buckets and pails. We had but eleven or twelve people to sustain this service; and notwithstanding all we could do, she was full, or very

near it; and then with a common cargo she must have sunk of course; but we had a great quantity of bees-wax and wood on board, which were specifically lighter than the water; and as it pleased God that we received this shock in the very crisis of the gale, towards morning we were enabled to employ some means for our safety, which succeeded beyond hope. In about an hour's time, the day began to break, and the wind abated. We expended most of our clothes and bedding to stop the leaks, (though the weather was exceeding cold, especially to us, who had so lately left a hot climate;) over these we nailed pieces of boards, and at last perceived the water abate. At the beginning of this hurry I was little affected. I pumped hard, and endeavoured to animate myself and my companions. I told one of them, that in a few days this distress would serve us to talk of over a glass of wine: but he being a less hardened sinner than myself, replied with tears, "No, it is too late now." About nine o'clock, being almost spent with cold and labour, I went to speak with the captain, who was busied elsewhere; and just as I was returning from him, I said, almost without any meaning, "If this will not do, the Lord have "mercy on us." This, (though spoken with little reflection,) was the first desire I had breathed for mercy for the space of many years. I was instantly struck with my own words, and, as Jehu said once, *What hast thou to do with peace?* So it directly occurred, *What mercy can there be for me?* I was obliged to return to the pump, and there I continued till noon, almost every passing wave breaking over my head; but we made ourselves fast with ropes, that we might not be washed away. Indeed, I expected that every time the vessel descended in the sea, she would rise no

more, and though I dreaded death *now*, and my heart foreboded the worst, if the Scriptures, which I had long since opposed, were indeed true; yet still I was but half-convinced, and remained for a space of time in a sullen frame, a mixture of despair and impatience. I thought, if the Christian religion was true, I could not be forgiven; and was therefore expecting, and almost, at times, wishing to know the worst of it.

January 19, 1763. I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

Dear Sir,

THE 10th, (that is, in the present style, the 21st,) of March, is a day much to be remembered by me, and I have never suffered it to pass wholly unnoticed since the year 1748. On that day the Lord sent from on high, and delivered me out of deep waters.—I continued at the pump from *three* in the *morning* till near *noon*, and then I could do no more. I went and lay down upon my bed, uncertain and almost indifferent, whether I should rise again. In an hour's time I was called; and not being able to pump, I went to the helm, and steered the ship till midnight, excepting a small interval for refreshment. I had here leisure and convenient opportunity for reflection. I began to think of my former religious professions; the extraordinary turns in my life; the calls, warnings, and deliverances I had met with; the licentious course of my conversation, particularly my unparalleled effrontery in making the gospel-history, (which I could not be sure was false, though I was not as yet assured it was true,) the con-

stant subject of profane ridicule. I thought, allowing the Scripture-premises, there never was, nor could be, such a sinner as myself; and then comparing the advantages I had broken through, I concluded at first, that my sins were too great to be forgiven. The Scripture likewise seemed to say the same; for I had formerly been well acquainted with the Bible, and many passages upon this occasion returned upon my memory, particularly those awful passages, Prov. i. 24—31. Heb. vi. 4. 6. and 2 Pet. ii. 20, which seemed so exactly to suit my case and character, as to bring with them a presumptive proof of a divine original. Thus, as I have said, I waited with fear and impatience to receive my inevitable doom. Yet though I had thoughts of this kind, they were exceeding faint and disproportionate; it was not till long after (perhaps several years,) till I had gained some clear views of the infinite righteousness and grace of Christ Jesus my Lord, that I had a deep and strong apprehension of my state by nature and practice; and perhaps till then I could not have borne the sight. So wonderfully does the Lord proportion the discoveries of sin and grace; for he knows our frame, and that if he was to put forth the greatness of his power, a poor sinner would be instantly overwhelmed, and crushed as a moth.—But to return: when I saw, beyond all probability, there was still hope of respite, and heard about six in the evening, that the ship was freed from water,—there arose a gleam of hope. I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favour: I began to pray.—I could not utter the prayer of faith; I could not draw near to a reconciled God, and call him Father. My prayer was like the cry of the ravens, which yet the Lord does not disdain to hear. I now began to think of that Jesus

whom I had so often derided: I recollected the particulars of his life, and of his death; a death for sins not his *own*, but, as I remembered, for the sake of those who in their distress should put their trust in him. And now I chiefly wanted evidence.——The comfortless principles of infidelity were deeply riveted, and I rather wished than believed these things were real facts. You will please to observe, Sir, that I collect the strain of the reasonings and exercises of my mind in one view: but I do not say that all this passed at one time. The great question now was, how to obtain *faith?* I speak not of an appropriating faith, (of which I then knew neither the nature nor necessity,) but how I should gain an assurance that the Scriptures were of divine inspiration, and a sufficient warrant for the exercise of trust and hope in God. One of the first helps I received, (in consequence of a determination to examine the New Testament more carefully,) was from Luke xi. 13. I had been sensible, that to profess faith in Jesus Christ, when in reality I did not believe his history, was no better than a mockery of the heart-searching God; but here I found a Spirit spoken of, which was to be communicated to those who ask it. Upon this I reasoned thus;—If this book be true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise: I have need of that very spirit by which the whole was wrote, in order to understand it aright. He has engaged here to give that Spirit to those who ask.——I must therefore pray for it; and if it is of God, he will make good his own word. My purposes were strengthened by John vii. 17. I concluded from thence, that though I could not say from my heart that I believed the Gospel, yet I would for the present take it for granted, and that by studying it in this light I should be more and more confirmed in it. If what I

am writing could be perused by our modern infidels, they would say, (for I too well know their manner,) that I was very desirous to persuade myself into this opinion. I confess I was; and so would they be, if the Lord would show them, as he was pleased to show me at that time, the absolute necessity of some expedient to interpose between a righteous God and a sinful soul. Upon the Gospel-scheme I saw at least a peradventure of hope, but on every other side I was surrounded with black unfathomable despair.

The wind was now moderate, but continued fair, and we were still drawing nearer to our port. We began to recover from our consternation, though we were greatly alarmed by our circumstances. We found that the water having floated all our moveables in the hold, all the casks of provision had been beaten in pieces by the violent motion of the ship: on the other hand, our live stock, such as pigs, sheep, and poultry, had been washed over board in the storm. In effect, all the provisions we saved, except the fish I mentioned, and some food of the pulse kind, which used to be given to the hogs, (and there was but little of this left,) all our other provisions would have subsisted us but a week at scanty allowance. The sails too, were mostly blown away, so that we advanced but slowly even while the wind was fair. We imagined ourselves about a hundred leagues from the land, but were in reality much further. Thus we proceeded with an alternate prevalence of hopes and fears.——My leisure time was chiefly employed in reading and meditating on the Scripture, and praying to the Lord for mercy and instruction.

Things continued thus for four or five days, or perhaps longer, till we were awakened one morning by the joyful shouts of the watch upon deck proclaiming

the sight of land. We were all soon raised at the sound. The dawning was uncommonly beautiful, and the light, (just strong enough to discover distant objects,) presented us with a gladdening prospect: it seemed a mountainous coast, about twenty miles from us, terminating in a cape or point, and a little further two or three small islands, or hummocks, as just rising out of the water; the appearance and position seemed exactly answerable to our hopes, resembling the north-west extremity of Ireland, which we were steering for. We sincerely congratulated each other, making no doubt but that, if the wind continued, we should be in safety and plenty the next day. The small remainder of our brandy, (which was reduced to little more than a pint,) was, by the captain's orders, distributed amongst us; he added at the same time, "We shall soon have "brandy enough."——We likewise ate up the residue of our bread for joy of this welcome sight, and were in the condition of men suddenly reprieved from death. While we were thus alert, the mate, with a graver tone than the rest, sunk our spirits, by saying, that "he "wished it might prove land at last." If one of the common sailors had first said so, I know not but the rest would have beat him for raising such an unreasonable doubt. It brought on, however, warm debates and disputes, whether it was land or no: but the case was soon unanswerably decided; for the day was advancing fast; and in a little time one of our fancied islands began to grow red from the approach of the sun, which soon arose just under it. In a word, we had been prodigal of our bread and brandy too hastily; our land was literally *in nubibus*, nothing but clouds; and in half an hour more, the whole appearance was dissipated. ——Seamen have often known deceptions of this sort,

but in our extremity we were very loth to be undeceived. However, we comforted ourselves, that though we could not see the land yet, we should soon, the wind hitherto continuing fair. But, alas! we were deprived of this hope likewise. That very day our fair wind subsided into a calm, and the next morning the gales sprung up from the south-east, directly against us, and continued so for more than a fortnight afterwards. The ship was so wrecked, that we were obliged to keep the wind always on the broken side, unless the weather was quite moderate. Thus we were driven, by the wind fixing in that quarter, still further from our port, to the northward of all Ireland, as far as the Lewis, or western islands of Scotland, but a long way to the westward. In a word, our station was such as deprived us of any hope of being relieved by other vessels. It may, indeed, be questioned, whether our ship was not the very first that had been in that part of the ocean at the same season of the year.

Provisions now began to grow very short; the half of a salted cod was a day's subsistence for twelve people. We had plenty of fresh water, but not a drop of stronger liquor; no bread, hardly any clothes, and very cold weather. We had incessant labour with the pumps, to keep the ship above water. Much labour and little food wasted us fast, and one man died under the hardship. Yet our sufferings were light in comparison of our just fears. We could not afford this bare allowance much longer, but had a terrible prospect of being either starved to death, or reduced to feed upon one another. Our expectations grew darker every day; and I had a further trouble peculiar to myself. The captain, whose temper was quite soured by distress, was hourly reproaching me, (as I formerly observed,)

as the sole cause of the calamity; and was confident, that if I was thrown overboard, and not otherwise, they should be preserved from death. He did not intend to make the experiment; but the continual repetition of this in my ears gave me much uneasiness, especially as my conscience seconded his words; I thought it very probable, that all that had befallen us was on my account. I was at last found out by the powerful hand of God, and condemned in my own breast. However, proceeding in the method I have described, I began to conceive hopes greater than all my fears; especially when at the time we were ready to give up all for lost, and despair was taking place in every countenance, I saw the wind come about to the very point we wished it, so as best to suit that broken part of the ship which must be kept out of the water, and to blow so gentle as our few remaining sails could bear; and thus it continued, without any observable alteration or increase, though at an unsettled time of the year, till we once more were called up to see the land, and were convinced that it was land indeed. We saw the island Tory, and the next day anchored in Lough Swilly in Ireland. This was the 8th of April, just four weeks after the damage we sustained from the sea. When we came into this port, our very last victuals was boiling in the pot; and before we had been there two hours, the wind, which seemed to have been providentially restrained till we were in a place of safety, began to blow with great violence; so that, if we had continued at sea that night in our shattered enfeebled condition, we must, in all human appearance, have gone to the bottom. About this time I began to know, that there is a God that hears and answers prayer. How many times has he appeared for me since this

great deliverance! Yet, alas! how distrustful and ungrateful is my heart unto this hour!

Jan. 19, 1763. I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

Dear Sir,

I HAVE brought my history down to the time of my arrival in Ireland, 1748; but before I proceed, I would look back a little, to give you some further account of the state of my mind, and how far I was helped against inward difficulties, which beset me at the time I had many outward hardships to struggle with. The straits of hunger, cold, weariness, and the fears of sinking, and starving, I shared in common with others; but, besides these, I felt a heart-bitterness, which was properly my own; no one on board but myself being impressed with any sense of the hand of God in our danger and deliverance, at least not awakened to any concern for their souls. No temporal dispensations can reach the heart, unless the Lord himself applies them. My companions in danger were either quite unaffected, or soon forgot it all: but it was not so with me; not that I was any wiser or better than they, but because the Lord was pleased to vouchsafe me peculiar mercy; otherwise I was the most unlikely person in the ship to receive an impression, having been often before quite stupid and hardened in the very face of great dangers, and always, till this time, had hardened my neck still more and more after every reproof.—I can see no reason why the Lord singled me out for mercy, but this, "that so it seemed good to him;" un-

less it was to show, by one astonishing instance, that with him "nothing is impossible."

There were no persons on board to whom I could open myself with freedom concerning the state of my soul; none from whom I could ask advice. As to books, I had a New Testament, Stanhope already mentioned, and a volume of bishop Beveridge's sermons, one of which, upon our Lord's passion, affected me much. In perusing the New Testament, I was struck with several passages, particularly that of the fig-tree, Luke xiii.; the case of St. Paul, 1 Tim. i.; but particularly the Prodigal, Luke xv.; a case, I thought, that had never been so nearly exemplified as by myself;—and then the goodness of the father in receiving, nay, in running to meet such a son, and this intended only to illustrate the Lord's goodness to returning sinners,—this gained upon me. I continued much in prayer; I saw that the Lord had interposed *so far* to save me; and I hoped he would do more. The outward circumstances helped in this place to make me still more serious and earnest in crying to him who alone could relieve me; and sometimes I thought I could be content to die even for want of food, so I might but die a believer. Thus far I was answered, that before we arrived in Ireland I had a satisfactory evidence in my own mind of the truth of the Gospel, as considered in itself, and its exact suitableness to answer all my needs. I saw that, by the way there pointed out, God might declare, not his mercy only, but his justice also, in the pardon of sin, on the account of the obedience and sufferings of Jesus Christ. My judgment at that time embraced the sublime doctrine of "God manifest in the flesh, reconciling the world "to himself." I had no idea of those systems which

allow the Saviour no higher honour than that of an *upper servant*, or, at the most, a *demi-god*. I stood in need of an Almighty Saviour, and such a one I found described in the New Testament. Thus far the Lord had wrought a marvellous thing; I was no longer an infidel; I heartily renounced my former profaneness; I had taken up some right notions, was seriously disposed, and sincerely touched with a sense of the undeserved mercy I had received, in being brought safe through so many dangers. I was sorry for my past mis-spent life, and purposed an immediate reformation: I was quite freed from the habit of swearing, which seemed to have been deeply rooted in me as a second nature. Thus, to all appearance, I was a new man.

But though I cannot doubt that this change, so far as it prevailed, was wrought by the Spirit and power of God; yet still I was greatly deficient in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my more enormous sins; but I was little aware of the innate evils of my heart. I had no apprehension of the spirituality and extent of the law of God; the hidden life of a Christian, as it consists in communion with God by Jesus Christ, and a continual dependence on him for hourly supplies of wisdom, strength, and comfort, was a mystery of which I had as yet no knowledge. I acknowledged the Lord's mercy in pardoning what was past, but depended chiefly upon my own resolution to do better for the time to come. I had no Christian friend or faithful minister to advise me that my strength was no more than my righteousness; and though I soon began to inquire for serious books, yet not having spiritual discernment, I frequently made a wrong choice; and I was not brought in the way of evangelical preaching or conversation, (except a few times when I heard but un-

derstood not,) for six years after this period. Those things the Lord was pleased to discover to me gradually. I learnt them here a little, and there a little, by my own painful experience, at a distance from the common means and ordinances, and in the midst of the same course of evil company, and bad examples, as I had been conversant with for some time. From this period I could no more make a mock at sin, or jest with holy things; I no more questioned the truth of Scripture, or lost a sense of the rebukes of conscience. Therefore I consider this as the beginning of my return to God, or rather of his return to me; but I cannot consider myself to have been a believer, (in the full sense of the word,) till a considerable time afterwards.

I have told you, that, in the time of our distress, we had fresh water in abundance. This was a considerable relief to us, especially as our spare diet was mostly salt-fish without bread; we drank plentifully, and were not afraid of wanting water; yet our stock of this likewise was much nearer to an end than we expected; we supposed that we had six large butts of water on board; and it was well that we were safe arrived in Ireland before we discovered that five of them were empty, having been removed out of their places, and stove by the violent agitation when the ship was full of water. If we had found this out while we were at sea, it would have greatly heightened our distress, as we must have drank more sparingly.

While the ship was refitting at Lough Swilly, I repaired to Londonderry. I lodged at an exceeding good house, where I was treated with much kindness, and soon recruited my health and strength. I was now a serious professor; went twice a-day to the prayers at church, and determined to receive the sacrament the

next opportunity, A few days before, I signified my intention to the minister, as the rubric directs; but I found this practice was grown obsolete. At length the day came: I arose very early, was very particular and earnest in my private devotion; and, with the greatest solemnity, engaged myself to be the Lord's for ever, and only his. This was not a formal but a sincere surrender, under a warm sense of mercies recently received; and yet, for want of a better knowledge of myself, and the subtilty of Satan's temptation, I was seduced to forget the vows of God that were upon me. Upon the whole, though my views of the Gospel-salvation were very indistinct, I experienced a peace and satisfaction in the ordinance that day, to which I had been hitherto a perfect stranger.

The next day I was abroad with the mayor of the city, and some other gentlemen, shooting: I climbed up a steep bank, and pulling my fowling-piece after me, as I held it in a perpendicular direction, it went off so near my face as to burn away the corner of my hat. Thus, when we think ourselves in the greatest safety, we are no less exposed to danger, than when all the elements seem conspiring to destroy us. The Divine Providence, which is sufficient to deliver us in our utmost extremity, is equally necessary to our preservation in the most peaceful situation.

During our stay in Ireland I wrote home. The vessel I was in had not been heard of for eighteen months, and was given up for lost long before. My father had no more expectation of hearing that I was alive; but he received my letter a few days before he left London. He was just going governor of York Fort in Hudson's Bay, from whence he never returned. He sailed before I landed in England, or he had pur-

posed to take me with him; but God designing otherwise, one hindrance or other delayed us in Ireland until it was too late. I received two or three affectionate letters from him, but I never had the pleasure of seeing him more. I had hopes, that, in three years more, I should have had an opportunity of asking his forgiveness for the uneasiness my disobedience had given him: but the ship that was to have brought him home came without him. According to the best accounts we received, he was seized with the cramp when bathing, and drowned, a little before her arrival in the bay.—Excuse this digression.

My father, willing to contribute all in his power to my satisfaction, paid a visit before his departure to my friends in Kent, and gave his consent to the union which had been so long talked of. Thus when I returned to ——, I found I had only the consent of one person to obtain; with her I as yet stood at as great an uncertainty as on the first day I saw her.

I arrived at ——— the latter end of May, 1748, about the same day that my father sailed from the Nore; but found the Lord had provided me another father in the gentleman whose ship had brought me home. He received me with great tenderness, and the strongest expressions of friendship and assistance: yet no more than he has since made good; for to him, as the instrument of God's goodness, I owe my all. Yet it would not have been in the power even of this friend to have served me effectually, if the Lord had not met with me on my way home, as I have related. Till then I was like the man possessed with the *legion*.—No arguments, no persuasion, no views of interest, no remembrance of the past, or regard to the future, could have constrained me within the bounds of common

prudence. But now I was in some measure restored to my senses. My friend immediately offered me the command of a ship; but, upon mature consideration, I declined it for the present. I had been hitherto always unsettled and careless; and therefore thought I had better make another voyage first, and learn to obey, and acquire a further insight and experience in business, before I ventured to undertake such a charge. The mate of the vessel I came home in was preferred to the command of a new ship, and I engaged to go in the station of mate with him. I made a short visit to London, &c. which did not fully answer my views. I had but one opportunity of seeing Mrs. N*****, of which I availed myself very little; for I was always exceeding awkward in pleading my own cause *viva voce*.——But after my return to L——, I put the question in such a manner, by letter, that she could not avoid, (unless I had greatly mistaken her,) coming to some sort of an explanation. Her answer, (though penned with abundance of caution,) satisfied me, as I collected from it, that she was free from any other engagement, and not unwilling to wait the event of the voyage I had undertaken. I should be ashamed to trouble you with these little details, if you had not yourself desired me.

January 20, 1763. I am, &c.

LETTER X.

Dear Sir,

MY connexions with sea-affairs have often led me to think, that the varieties observable in Christian experience may be properly illustrated from the circum-

stances of a voyage. Imagine to yourself a number of vessels, at different times, and from different places, bound to the same port; there are some things in which all these would agree,—the compass steered by, the port in view, the general rules of navigation, both as to the management of the vessel, and determining their astronomical observations, would be the same in all. In other respects they would differ: perhaps no two of them would meet with the same distribution of winds and weather. Some we see set out with a prosperous gale: and when they almost think their passage secured, they are checked by adverse blasts; and, after enduring much hardship and danger, and frequent expectations of shipwreck, they just escape, and reach the desired haven. Others meet the greatest difficulties at first; they put forth in a storm, and are often beaten back; at length their voyage proves favourable, and they enter the port with a πληροφορια, a rich and abundant entrance. Some are hard beset with cruisers and enemies, and obliged to fight their way through; others meet with little remarkable in their passage. Is it not thus in the spiritual life? All true believers walk by the same rule, and mind the same things: the word of God is their compass; Jesus is both their polar star and their sun of righteousness; their hearts and faces are all set Sion-ward. Thus far they are as one body, animated by one spirit; yet their experience, formed upon these common principles, is far from being uniform. The Lord, in his first call, and his following dispensations, has a regard to the situation, temper, talents of each, and to the particular services or trials he has appointed them for. Though all are exercised at times, yet some pass through the voyage of life much more smoothly than others. But he "who walketh

" upon the wings of the wind, and measures the wa-
" ters in the hollow of his hand," will not suffer any of whom he has once taken charge, to perish in the storms, though for a season, perhaps, many of them are ready to give up all hopes.

We must not, therefore, make the experience of others, in all respects, a rule to ourselves, nor our own a rule to others; yet these are common mistakes, and productive of many more. As to myself, every part of my case has been extraordinary.—I have hardly met a single instance resembling it. Few, very few, have been recovered from such a dreadful state; and the few that have been thus favoured, have generally passed through the most severe convictions; and after the Lord has given them peace, their future lives have been usually more zealous, bright, and exemplary, than common. Now as, on the one hand, my convictions were very moderate, and far below what might have been expected from the dreadful review I had to make; so, on the other, my first beginnings in a religious course were as faint as can be well imagined. I never knew that season alluded to, Jer. ii. 2. Rev. ii. 4. usually called *the time of the first love.* Who would not expect to hear, that after such a wonderful unhoped-for deliverance as I had received, and after my eyes were in some measure enlightened to see things aright, I should immediately cleave to the Lord and his ways, with full purpose of heart, and consult no more with flesh and blood? But, alas! it was far otherwise with me. I had learned to pray: I set some value upon the word of God, and was no longer a libertine: but my soul still cleaved to the dust. Soon after my departure from L——, I began to intermit, and grow slack in waiting upon the Lord: I grew vain and tri-

fling in my conversation; and though my heart smote me often, yet my armour was gone, and I declined fast; and by the time I arrived at Guinea, I seemed to have forgot all the Lord's mercies, and my own engagements, and was, (profaneness excepted,) almost as bad as before. The enemy prepared a train of temptations, and I became his easy prey; and, for about a month, he lulled me asleep in a course of evil, of which, a few months before, I could not have supposed myself any longer capable. How much propriety is there in the apostle's advice, "Take heed, lest any of you be "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin?" O who can be sufficiently upon their guard! Sin first deceives, and then it hardens. I was now fast bound in chains; I had little desire, and no power at all, to recover myself. I could not but at times reflect how it was with me; but if I attempted to struggle with it, it was in vain. I was just like Samson, when he said, "I will "go forth, and shake myself as at other times;" but the Lord was departed, and he found himself helpless, in the hands of his enemies. By the remembrance of this interval, the Lord has often instructed me since, what a poor creature I am in myself, incapable of standing a single hour, without continual fresh supplies of strength and grace from the fountain-head.

At length the Lord, whose mercies are infinite, interposed in my behalf. My business in this voyage, while upon the coast, was to sail from place to place in the long boat, to purchase slaves. The ship was at Sierra Leone, and I then at the Plantanes, the scene of my former captivity, where every thing I saw might seem to remind me of my ingratitude. I was in easy circumstances, courted by those who formerly despised me: the *lime-trees* I had planted were growing tall, and pro-

mised fruit the following year; against which time I had expectations of returning with a ship of my own. But none of these things affected me, till, as I have said, the Lord again interposed to save me. He visited me with a violent fever, which broke the fatal chain, and once more brought me to myself. But, O what a prospect! I thought myself now summoned away.——My past dangers and deliverances, my earnest prayers in the time of trouble, my solemn vows before the Lord at his table, and my ungrateful returns for all his goodness, were all present to my mind at once. Then I began to wish that the Lord had suffered me to sink into the ocean, when I first besought his mercy. For a little while I concluded the door of hope to be quite shut; but this continued not long. Weak, and almost delirious, I arose from my bed, and crept to a retired part of the island; and here I found a renewed liberty to pray. I durst make no more resolves, but cast myself before the Lord, to do with me as he should please. I do not remember that any particular text, or remarkable discovery, was presented to my mind; but in general I was enabled to hope and believe in a crucified Saviour. The burden was removed from my conscience, and not only my peace, but my health was restored: I cannot say instantaneously; but I recovered from that hour; and so fast, that when I returned to the ship, two days afterwards, I was perfectly well before I got on board. And from that time, I trust, I have been delivered from the power and dominion of sin; though as to the effects and conflicts of sin dwelling in me, I still "groan, being burdened." I now began again to wait upon the Lord; and though I have often grieved his Spirit, and foolishly wandered from him since, (when, alas! shall I be more wise?) yet his

powerful grace has hitherto preserved me from such black declensions as this I have last recorded ; and I humbly trust in his mercy and promises, that he will be my guide and guard to the end.

My leisure hours in this voyage were chiefly employed in learning the Latin language, which I had now entirely forgot. This desire took place from an imitation I had seen of one of Horace's odes in a Magazine. I began the attempt under the greatest disadvantages possible ; for I pitched upon a poet, perhaps, the most difficult of the poets, even Horace himself, for my first book. I had picked up an old English translation of him, which, with Castalio's Latin Bible, were all my helps. I forgot a Dictionary ; but I would not therefore give up my purpose. I had the edition *in usum Delphini ;* and by comparing the Odes with the interpretation, and tracing the words I could understand from one place to another by the index, with the assistance I could get from the Latin Bible : in this way, by dint of hard industry, often waking when I might have slept, I made some progress before I returned, and not only understood the sense and meaning of many Odes, and some of the Epistles, but began to relish the beauties of the composition, and acquired a spice of what Mr. Law calls *classical enthusiasm.* And indeed, by this means, I had Horace more *ad unguem* than some who are masters of the Latin tongue ; for my helps were so few, that I generally had the passage fixed in my memory, before I could fully understand its meaning.

My business in the long-boat, during eight months we were upon the Coast, exposed me to innumerable dangers and perils, from burning suns and chilling dews, winds, rains, and thunder-storms, in the open boat; and

on shore, from long journeys through the woods, and the temper of the natives, who are in many places cruel, treacherous, and watching opportunities for mischief. Several boats in the same time were cut off, several white men poisoned, and in my own boat I buried six or seven people with fevers. When going on shore, or returning from it in their little canoes, I have been more than once or twice overset by the violence of the surf, or breach of the sea, and brought to land half-dead, (for I could not swim.) An account of such escapes as I still remember, would swell to several sheets, and many more I have perhaps forgot; I shall only select one instance, as a specimen of that wonderful providence which watched over me for good, and which, I doubt not, you will think worthy of notice.

When our trade was finished, and we were near sailing to the West Indies, the only remaining service I had to perform in the boat, was to assist in bringing the wood and water from the shore. We were then at Rio Cestors. I used to go into the river in the afternoon with the sea breeze, procure my loading in the evening, and return on board in the morning with the land-wind. Several of these little voyages I had made; but the boat was grown old, and almost unfit for use. This service likewise was almost completed. One day, having dined on board, I was preparing to return to the river as formerly: I had taken leave of the captain, received his orders, was ready in the boat, and just going to put off, as we term it; that is, to let go our ropes, and sail from the ship. In that instant the captain came up from the cabin, and called me on board again.——I went, expecting further orders; but he said, he had *took it in his head*, (as he phrased it,) that I should remain that day in the ship; and accordingly ordered another

man to go in my room. I was surprised at this, as the boat had never been sent away without me before, and asked him the reason: he could give me no reason but as above, that so he would have it. Accordingly the boat went without me; but returned no more: she sunk that night in the river, and the person who had supplied my place was drowned. I was much struck when we received news of the event the next morning.—The captain himself, though quite a stranger to religion, so far as to deny a particular providence, could not help being affected; but he declared, that he had no other reason for countermanding me at that time, but that it came suddenly into his mind to detain me.——I wonder I omitted this in my eight letters, as I have always thought it one of the most extraordinary circumstances of my life.

January 21, 1763. I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

Dear Sir,

A FEW days after I was thus wonderfully saved from an unforeseen danger, we sailed for Antigua, and from thence proceeded to Charlestown in South Carolina. In this place there are many serious people; but I knew not where to find them out: indeed I was not aware of a difference, but supposed that all who attended public worship were good Christians. I was as much in the dark about preaching, not doubting but whatever came from the pulpit must be very good. I had two or three opportunities of hearing a dissenting minister, named Smith, who, by what I have known since, I believe to

have been an excellent and powerful preacher of the Gospel; and there was something in his manner that struck me, but I did not rightly understand him. The best words that men can speak are ineffectual, till explained and applied by the Spirit of God, who alone can open the heart. It pleased the Lord, for some time, that I should learn no more than what he enabled me to collect from my own experience and reflection. My conduct was now very inconsistent.—Almost every day, when business would permit, I used to retire into the woods and fields, (for these, when at hand, have always been my favourite oratories,) and I trust I began to taste the sweets of communion with God, in the exercises of prayer and praise; and yet I frequently spent the evenings in vain and worthless company. Indeed, my relish for worldly diversions was much weakened, and I was rather a spectator than a sharer in their pleasures; but I did not as yet see the necessity of an absolute forbearance. Yet, as my compliance with custom and company was chiefly owing to want of light, rather than to an obstinate attachment, and the Lord was pleased to preserve me from what I *knew* was sinful, I had for the most part peace of conscience, and my strongest desires were towards the things of God. As yet I knew not the force of that precept, "Abstain "from all appearance of evil;"—but very often ventured upon the brink of temptation: but the Lord was gracious to my weakness, and would not suffer the enemy to prevail against me. I did not break with the world at once, (as might in my case have been expected,) but I was gradually led to see the inconvenience and folly of one thing after another; and when I saw it, the Lord strengthened me to give it up. But it was some

years before I was set quite at liberty from occasional compliances in many things in which at this time I durst by no means allow myself.

We finished our voyage, and arrived in L——. When the ship's affairs were settled, I went to London, and from thence, (as you may suppose,) I soon repaired to Kent. More than seven years were now elapsed since my first visit.—No views of the kind could seem more chimerical, or could subsist under greater discouragements than mine had done; yet, through the over-ruling goodness of God, while I seemed abandoned to myself, and blindly following my own headstrong passions, I was guided by a hand that I knew not to the accomplishment of my wishes. Every obstacle was now removed. I had renounced my former follies, my interest was established, and friends on all sides consenting: the point was now entirely between ourselves; and, after what had passed, was easily concluded.——Accordingly our hands were joined on the 1st of February 1750.

The satisfaction I have found in this union, you will suppose, has been greatly heightened by reflection on the former disagreeable contrasts I had gone through, and the views I have had of the singular mercy and providence of the Lord in bringing it to pass. If you please to look back to the beginning of my sixth letter (p. 45,) I doubt not but you will allow, that few persons have known more, either of the misery or happiness of which human life, (as considered in itself,) is capable. How easily, at a time of life when I was so little capable of judging (but a few months more than seventeen,) might my affections have been fixed where they could have met with no return, or where success would have been the heaviest disappointment. The

long delay I met with was likewise a mercy; for had I succeeded a year or two sooner, before the Lord was pleased to change my heart, we must have been mutually unhappy, even as to the present life. "Surely "mercy and goodness have followed me all my days."

But, alas! I soon began to feel that my heart was still hard and ungrateful to the God of my life. This crowning mercy, which raised me to all I could ask or wish in a temporal view, and which ought to have been an animating motive to obedience and praise, had a contrary effect.—I rested in the gift, and forgot the giver. My poor narrow heart was *satisfied.*—A cold and careless frame, as to spiritual things, took place, and gained ground daily. Happily for me, the season was advancing, and in June I received orders to repair to L——. This roused me from my dream; I need not tell you that I found the pains of absence and separation fully proportioned to my preceding pleasure. It was hard, very hard, to part, especially as conscience interfered, and suggested to me how little I deserved that we should be spared to meet again.—But the Lord supported me. I was a poor, faint, idolatrous creature; but I had now some acquaintance with the way of access to a throne of grace by the blood of Jesus; and peace was soon restored to my conscience. Yet through all the following voyage my irregular and excessive affections were as thorns in my eyes, and often made my other blessings tasteless and insipid. But he who doth all things well, over-ruled this likewise for good. It became an occasion of quickening me in prayer both for her and myself; it increased my indifference for company and amusement; it habituated me to a kind of voluntary self-denial, which I was afterwards taught to improve to a better purpose.

While I remained in England, we corresponded every post; and all the while I used the sea afterwards, I constantly kept up the practice of writing two or three times a week, (if weather and business permitted,) though no conveyance homeward offered for six or eight months together. My packets were usually heavy; and as not one of them at any time miscarried, I have to the amount of near two hundred sheets of paper now lying in my bureau of that correspondence. I mention this little relief I contrived to soften the intervals of absence, because it had a good effect beyond my first intention. It habituated me to think and write upon a great variety of subjects; and I acquired, insensibly, a greater readiness of expressing myself than I should have otherwise attained. As I gained more ground in religious knowledge, my letters became more serious; and, at times, I still find an advantage in looking them over; especially as they remind me of my many providential incidents, and the state of my mind at different periods in these voyages, which would otherwise have escaped my memory.

I sailed from L—— in August 1750, commander of a good ship. I have no very extraordinary events to recount from this period, and shall therefore contract my memoirs, lest I become tedious; yet I am willing to give you a brief sketch of my history down to 1755, the year of my settlement in my present situation. I had now the command and care of thirty persons: I endeavoured to treat them with humanity, and to set them a good example: I likewise established public worship, according to the liturgy, twice every Lord's day, officiating myself. Further than this I did not proceed, while I continued in that employment.

Having now much leisure, I prosecuted the study of the Latin with good success. I remembered a dictionary this voyage, and procured two or three other books; but still it was my hap to choose the hardest. I added Juvenal to Horace; and, for prose authors, I pitched upon Livy, Cæsar, and Sallust. You will easily conceive, Sir, that I had hard work, to begin, (where I should have left off,) with Horace and Livy. I was not aware of the difference of style; I had heard Livy highly commended, and was resolved to understand him. I began with the first page and laid down a rule, which I seldom departed from, not to proceed to a second period till I understood the first, and so on. I was often at a stand, but seldom discouraged: here and there I found a few lines quite obstinate, and was forced to break in upon my rule, and give them up, especially as my edition had only the text, without any notes to assist me. But there were not many such; for before the close of that voyage, I could, (with a few exceptions,) read Livy from end to end, almost as readily as an English author. And I found, in surmounting this difficulty, I had surmounted all in one. Other prose authors, when they came in my way, cost me little trouble. In short, in the space of two or three voyages, I became tolerably acquainted with the best classics, (I put all I have to say upon this subject together;) I read Terrence, Virgil, and several pieces of Cicero, and the modern classics, Buchanan, Erasmus, and Cassimir. At length I conceived a design of becoming Ciceronian myself, and thought it would be a fine thing indeed to write pure and elegant Latin. I made some essays towards it, but by this time the Lord was pleased to draw me nearer to himself, and to give me a fuller view of the "pearl of great price," the in-

estimable treasure hid in the field of the holy Scripture; and, for the sake of this, I was made willing to part with all my new-acquired riches. I began to think that life was too short, (especially my life,) to admit of leisure for such elaborate trifling. Neither poet nor historian could tell me a word of Jesus, and I therefore applied myself to those who could. The classics were at first restrained to one morning in the week, and at length quite laid aside. I have not looked in Livy these five years, and I suppose I could not now well understand him. Some passages in Horace and Virgil I still admire; but they seldom come in my way. I prefer Buchanan's Psalms to a whole shelf of Elzevirs.——But thus much I have gained, and more than this I am not solicitous about, so much of the Latin as enables me to read any useful or curious book that is published in that language. About the same time, and for the same reason that I quarrelled with Livy, I laid aside the mathematics.—I found they not only cost me much time, but engrossed my thoughts too far; my head was literally full of *schemes*. I was weary of cold contemplative truths, which can neither warm nor amend the heart, but rather tend to aggrandize *self*. I found no traces of this wisdom in the life of Jesus, or the writings of Paul. I do not regret that I have had some opportunities of knowing the first principles of these things: but I see much cause to praise the Lord that he inclined me to stop in time; and, whilst I was "spending my labours for that which is not bread," was pleased to set before me "wine and milk without "money and without price."

My first voyage was fourteen months, through various scenes of danger and difficulty, but nothing very remarkable; and, as I intend to be more particular

with regard to the second, I shall only say, that I was preserved from every harm: and having seen many fall on my right hand and on my left, I was brought home in peace, and restored to where my thoughts had been often directed, November 2, 1751.

January 22, 1763. I am, &c.

LETTER XII.

Dear Sir,

I ALMOST wish I could recall my last sheet, and retract my promise. I fear I have engaged too far, and shall prove a mere *egotist*. What have I more that can deserve your notice? However, it is some satisfaction that I am now writing to yourself only; and, I believe, you will have candour to excuse what nothing but a sense of your kindness could extort from me.

Soon after the period where my last closes, that is, in the interval between my first and second voyage after my marriage, I began to keep a sort of diary; a practice which I have since found of great use. I had in this interval repeated proofs of the ingratitude and evil of my heart. A life of ease, in the midst of my friends, and the full satisfaction of my wishes, was not favourable to the progress of grace, and afforded cause of daily humiliation. Yet, upon the whole, I gained ground. I became acquainted with books, which gave me a further view of Christian doctrine and experience; particularly, *Scougal's Life of God in the Soul of Man*, *Hervey's Meditations*, and *the Life of Colonel Gardiner*. As to preaching, I heard none but the common sort, and had hardly an idea of any better; neither had

I the advantage of Christian acquaintance. I was likewise greatly hindered by a cowardly reserved spirit; I was afraid of being thought precise; and though I could not live without prayer, I durst not propose it even to my wife, till she herself first put me upon it; so far was I from those expressions of zeal and love, which seem so suitable to the case of one who has had much forgiven. In a few months the returning season called me abroad again, and I sailed from L——, in a new ship, July, 1752.

A sea-faring life is necessarily excluded from the benefit of public ordinances and Christian communion: but, as I have observed, my loss upon these heads was at this time but small. In other respects, I know not any calling that seems more favourable, or affords greater advantages to an awakened mind, for promoting the life of God in the soul; especially to a person who has the command of a ship, and thereby has it in his power to restrain gross irregularities in others, and to dispose of his own time; and still more so in African voyages, as these ships carry a double proportion of men and officers to most others, which made my department very easy; and, excepting the hurry of trade, &c. upon the coast, which is rather occasional than constant, afforded me abundance of leisure. To be at sea in these circumstances, withdrawn out of the reach of innumerable temptations, with opportunity and a turn of mind disposed to observe the wonders of God in the great deep, with the two noblest objects of sight, the expanded *heavens*, and the expanded *ocean*, continually in view; and where evident interpositions of Divine Providence, in answer to prayer, occur almost every day: these are helps to quicken and confirm the life of faith, which in a good measure supply to a reli-

gious sailor the want of those advantages which can be enjoyed only upon the shore. And indeed, though my knowledge of spiritual things, as knowledge is usually estimated, was at this time very small; yet I sometimes look back with regret upon those scenes. I never knew sweeter or more frequent hours of divine communion, than in my two last voyages to Guinea, when I was either almost secluded from society on shipboard, or when on shore amongst the natives. I have wandered through the woods, reflecting on the singular goodness of the Lord to me, in a place where, perhaps, there was not a person that knew him for some thousand miles round me. Many a time, upon these occasions, I have restored the beautiful lines of Propertius to their right owner; lines full of blasphemy and madness when addressed to a creature, but full of comfort and propriety in the mouth of a believer.

Sic ego desertis possim bene vivere sylvis,
Quæ nulla humano sit via trita pede:
Tu mihi curarum requies, in nocte vel atra
Lumen, et in solis tu mihi turba locis.

PARAPHRASED.

In desert woods, with thee, my God,
Where human footsteps never trod,
How happy could I be!
Thou my repose from care, my light
Amidst the darkness of the night,
In solitude my company.

In the course of this voyage I was wonderfully preserved in the midst of many obvious and many unforeseen dangers. At one time there was a conspiracy amongst my own people to turn pirates, and take the

ship from me. When the plot was nearly ripe, and they waited only a convenient opportunity, two of those concerned in it were taken ill one day; one of them died, and he was the only person I buried while on board. This suspended the affair, and opened a way to its discovery, or the consequence might have been fatal. The slaves on board were likewise frequently plotting insurrections, and were sometimes upon the very brink of mischief; but it was always disclosed in due time. When I have thought myself most secure, I have been suddenly alarmed with danger; and when I have almost despaired of life, as suddenly a deliverance has been vouchsafed me. My stay upon the Coast was long, the trade very precarious; and, in the pursuit of my business, both on board and on shore, I was *in deaths often.* Let the following instance serve as a specimen.

I was at a place called *Mana*, near Cape Mount, where I had transacted very large concerns; and had, at the time I am speaking of, some debts and accounts to settle, which required my attendance on shore, and I intended to go the next morning. When I arose I left the ship, according to my purpose; but when I came near the shore, the surf, or breach of the sea, ran so high, that I was almost afraid to attempt landing. Indeed I had often ventured at a worse time; but I felt an inward hindrance and backwardness, which I could not account for: the surf furnished a pretext for indulging it; and after waiting and hesitating for about half an hour, I returned to the ship, without doing my business; which I think I never did, but that morning, in all the time I used that trade.——But I soon perceived the reason of all this.——It seems, the day before I intended to land, a scandalous and groundless

charge had been laid against me, (by whose instigation I could never learn,) which greatly threatened my honour and interest, both in Africa and England, and would perhaps, humanly speaking, have affected my life, if I had landed according to my intention. I shall, perhaps, inclose a letter, which will give a full account of this strange adventure; and therefore shall say no more of it here, any further than to tell you, that an attempt aimed to destroy either my life or character, and which might very probably, in its consequences, have ruined my voyage, passed off without the least inconvenience. The person most concerned owed me about a hundred pounds, which he sent me in a huff; and otherwise, perhaps, would not have paid me at all. I was very uneasy for a few hours, but was soon afterwards comforted. I heard no more of my accusation till the next voyage: and then it was publicly acknowledged to be a malicious calumny, without the least shadow of a ground.

Such were the vicissitudes and difficulties through which the Lord preserved me. Now and then both faith and patience were sharply exercised; but suitable strength was given; and as those things did not occur every day, the study of the Latin, of which I gave a general account in my last, was renewed, and carried on from time to time when business would permit. I was mostly very regular in the management of my time; I allotted eight hours for sleep and meals, eight hours for exercise and devotion, and eight hours to my books: and thus, by diversifying my engagements, the whole day was agreeably filled up; and I seldom found a day too long, or an hour to spare. My studies kept me employed; and so far it was well: otherwise they were hardly worth the time they cost, as they led me to an admiration of

false models and false maxims; an almost unavoidable consequence, (I suppose,) of an admiration of classic authors. Abating what I have attained of the language, I think I might have read *Cassandra* or *Cleopatra* to as good purpose as I read Livy, whom I now account an equal *romancer*, though in a different way.

From the Coast I went to St. Christopher's; and here my idolatrous heart was its own punishment. The letters I expected from Mrs. N***** were by mistake forwarded to Antigua, which had been at first proposed as our port. As I was certain of her punctuality in writing, if alive, I concluded, by not hearing from her, that she was surely dead. This fear affected me more and more; I lost my appetite and rest; I felt an incessant pain in my stomach; and in about three weeks time, I was near sinking under the weight of an imaginary stroke. I felt some severe symptoms of that mixture of pride and madness which is commonly called *a broken heart;* and indeed I wonder that this case is not more common than it appears to be. How often do the potsherds of the earth presume to contend with their maker! and what a wonder of mercy is it that they are not all broken! However, my complaint was not all grief; conscience had a share. I thought my unfaithfulness to God had deprived me of her, especially my backwardness in speaking of spiritual things, which I could hardly attempt even to her. It was this thought, that I had lost invaluable, irrecoverable opportunities, which both duty and affection should have engaged me to improve, that chiefly stung me; and I thought, I would have given the world to know she was living, that I might at least discharge my engagements by writing, though I was never to see her again. This was a sharp lesson; but I hope it did me good; and when I

had thus suffered some weeks, I thought of sending a small vessel to Antigua. I did so; and she brought me several packets; which restored my health and peace, and gave me a strong contrast of the Lord's goodness to me, and my unbelief and ingratitude towards him.

In August, 1753, I returned to L——. My stay was very short at home that voyage, only six weeks. In that space, nothing very memorable occurred; I shall therefore begin my next with an account of my third and last voyage. And thus I give both you and myself hopes of a speedy period to these memoirs, which begin to be tedious and minute, even to myself; only I am animated by the thought, that I write at your request; and have therefore an opportunity of showing myself, &c.

January 31, 1763.

LETTER XIII.

Dear Sir,

MY third voyage was shorter and less perplexed than either of the former. Before I sailed, I met with a young man who had formerly been a midshipman, and my intimate companion on board the Harwich. He was, at the time I first knew him, a sober youth; but I found too much success in my unhappy attempts to infect him with libertine principles. When we met at L——, our acquaintance renewed upon the ground of our former intimacy. He had good sense, and had read many books.—Our conversation frequently turned upon religion; and I was very desirous to repair the mischief I had done him. I gave him a plain account of the man-

ner and reason of my change, and used every argument to persuade him to relinquish his infidel schemes; and when I sometimes pressed him so close, that he had no other reply to make, he would remind me, that I was the very first person who had given him an idea of his liberty. This occasioned me many mournful reflections. He was then going master to Guinea himself; but before his ship was ready his merchant became a bankrupt, which disconcerted his voyage. As he had no further expectations for that year, I offered to take him with me as a companion, that he might gain a knowledge of the Coast; and the gentlemen who employed me promised to provide for him upon his return. My view in this was not so much to serve him in his business, as to have an opportunity of debating the point with him at leisure; and I hoped, in the course of my voyage, my arguments, example, and prayers, might have some good effect on him. My intention in this step was better than my judgment; and I had frequent reason to repent it. He was exceedingly profane, and grew worse and worse. I saw in him a most lively picture of what I had once been; but it was very inconvenient to have it always before my eyes. Besides, he was not only deaf to my remonstrances himself, but laboured all he could to counteract my influence upon others. His spirit and passions were likewise exceeding high; so that it required all my prudence and authority to hold him in any degree of restraint. He was as a sharp thorn in my side for some time; but at length I had an opportunity upon the Coast of buying a small vessel, which I supplied with a cargo from my own, and gave him the command, and sent him away to trade on the ship's account. When we parted, I repeated and enforced my best advice. I believe his friendship and regard was as great as could

be expected, where principles were so diametrically opposite. He seemed greatly affected when I left him; but my words had no weight with him: when he found himself at liberty from under my eye, he gave a hasty loose to every appetite; and his violent irregularities, joined to the heat of the climate, soon threw him into a malignant fever, which carried him off in a few days. He died convinced, but not changed. The account I had from those who were with him was dreadful. His rage and despair struck them all with horror; and he pronounced his own fatal doom before he expired, without any appearance that he either *hoped* or *asked* for mercy. I thought this awful contrast might not be improper to give you, as a stronger view of the distinguishing goodness of God to me, the chief of sinners.

I left the Coast in about four months, and sailed for St. Christopher's. Hitherto I had enjoyed a perfect state of health, equally in every climate, for several years; but upon this passage I was visited with a fever, which gave me a very near prospect of eternity. I have obtained liberty to inclose you three or four letters, which will more clearly illustrate the state and measure of my experience at different times, than any thing I can say at present. One of them, you will find, was wrote at this period, when I could hardly hold a pen, and had some reason to believe I should write no more. I had not that πληροφορια * which is so desirable at a time when flesh and heart fails; but my hopes were greater than my fears; and I felt a silent composure of spirit, which enabled me to wait the event without much anxiety. My trust, though weak

* Full assurance.

in degree, was alone fixed upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus; and those words, "He is able to save "to the uttermost," gave me great relief.——I was for a while troubled with a very singular thought; whether it was a temptation, or that the fever disordered my faculties, I cannot say; but I seemed not so much afraid of wrath and punishment, as of being lost, and overlooked amidst the myriads that are continually entering the unseen world. What is my soul, thought I, among such an innumerable multitude of beings?—— And this troubled me greatly. Perhaps the Lord will take no notice of me. I was perplexed thus for some time; but at last a text of Scripture, very apposite to the case, occurred to my mind, and put an end to the doubt: "The Lord knoweth them that are his." In about ten days, beyond the hopes of those about me, I began to amend; and by the time of our arrival in the West-Indies, I was perfectly recovered.—I hope this visitation was made useful to me.

Thus far, that is, for about the space of six years, the Lord was pleased to lead me in a secret way.—— I had learned something of the evil of my heart; I had read the Bible over and over, with several good books, and had a general view of the *Gospel-truth:* but my conceptions were, in many respects, confused, not having in all this time met with one acquaintance who could assist my inquiries. But upon my arrival at St. Christopher's this voyage, I found a captain of a ship from London, whose conversation was greatly helpful to me. He was and is a member of Mr. B——r's church, a man of experience in the things of God, and of a lively, communicative turn. We discovered each other by some casual expressions in mixed company, and soon became, so far as business would permit, in-

separable. For near a month we spent every evening together on board each other's ship alternately, and often prolonged our visits till towards day-break. I was all ears; and what was better, he not only informed my understanding, but his discourse inflamed my heart.—— He encouraged me to open my mouth in social prayer; he taught me the advantage of Christian converse; he put me upon an attempt to make my profession more public, and to venture to speak for God. From him, or rather from the Lord by his means, I received an increase of knowledge: my conceptions became clearer and more evangelical; and I was delivered from a fear which had long troubled me—the fear of relapsing into my former apostasy. But now I began to understand the security of the covenant of grace, and to expect to be preserved, not by my own power and holiness, but by the mighty power and promise of God, through faith in an unchangeable Saviour. He likewise gave me a general view of the state of religion, with the errors and controversies of the times, (things to which I had been entirely a stranger,) and finally directed me where to apply in London for further instruction. With these new-acquired advantages, I left him; and my passage homewards gave me leisure to digest what I had received. I had much comfort and freedom during those seven weeks, and my sun was seldom clouded. I arrived safe in L—— August 1754.

My stay at home was intended to be but short; and by the beginning of November I was again ready for the sea: but the Lord saw fit to over-rule my design. During the time I was engaged in the slave-trade, I never had the least scruple as to its lawfulness. I was upon the whole satisfied with it, as the appointment Providence had marked out for me; yet it was, in

many respects, far from eligible. It is, indeed, accounted a genteel employment, and is usually very profitable, though to me it did not prove so, the Lord seeing that a large increase of wealth would not be good for me. However, I considered myself as a sort of *gaoler* or *turnkey*, and I was sometimes shocked with an employment that was perpetually conversant with chains, bolts, and shackles. In this view I had often petitioned in my prayers, that the Lord, in his own time, would be pleased to fix me in a more humane calling; and, if it might be, place me where I might have more frequent converse with his people and ordinances, and be freed from those long separations from home which very often were hard to bear. My prayers were now answered, though in a way I little expected. I now experienced another sudden unforeseen change of life. I was within two days of sailing, and to all appearance in good health as usual; but in the afternoon, as I was sitting with Mrs. N*****, by ourselves, drinking tea, and talking over past events, I was in a moment seized with a fit, which deprived me of sense and motion, and left me no other sign of life than that of breathing.—I suppose it was of the apoplectic kind.—It lasted about an hour; and when I recovered, it left a pain and dizziness in my head, which continued with such symptoms as induced the physicians to judge it would not be safe or prudent for me to proceed on the voyage. Accordingly, by the advice of my friend to whom the ship belonged, I resigned the command the day before she sailed; and thus I was unexpectedly called from that service, and freed from a share of the future consequences of that voyage, which proved extremely calamitous. The person who went in my room, most of the officers, and many of the crew, died,

and the vessel was brought home with great difficulty.

As I was now disengaged from business, I left L——, and spent most of the following year at London and in Kent. But I entered upon a new trial. ——You will easily conceive, that Mrs. N***** was not an unconcerned spectator, when I lay extended, and as she thought, expiring upon the ground. In effect, the blow that struck me reached her in the same instant: she did not indeed immediately feel it, till her apprehensions on my account began to subside; but as I grew better, she became worse: her surprise threw her into a disorder which no physicians could define, or medicines remove. Without any of the ordinary symptoms of a consumption, she decayed almost visibly, till she became so weak, that she could hardly bear any one to walk across the room she was in. I was placed for about eleven months in what Dr. Young calls the

> ——dreadful post of observation,
> Darker every hour.

It was not till after my settlement in my present station, that the Lord was pleased to restore her by his own hand, when all hopes from ordinary means were at an end. But before this took place, I have some other particulars to mention, which must be the subject of the following sheet, which I hope will be the last on this subject, from, &c.

February 1, 1763.

LETTER XIV.

Dear Sir,

BY the directions I had received from my friend at St. Kitt's, I soon found out a religious acquaintance in London. I first applied to Mr. B——, and chiefly attended upon his ministry when in town. From him I received many helps, both in public and private; for he was pleased to favour me with his friendship from the first. His kindness, and the intimacy between us, has continued and increased to this day; and of all my many friends, I am most deeply indebted to him. The late Mr. H——d was my second acquaintance, a man of a choice spirit, and an abundant zeal for the Lord's service. I enjoyed his correspondence till near the time of his death. Soon after, upon Mr. W——d's return from America, my two good friends introduced me to him; and though I had little personal acquaintance with him till afterwards, his ministry was exceeding useful to me. I had likewise access to some religious societies, and became known to many excellent Christians in private life. Thus, when at London, I lived at the fountain-head, as it were, for spiritual advantages. When I was in Kent it was very different; yet I found some serious persons there: but the fine variegated woodland country afforded me advantages of another kind. Most of my time, at least some hours every day, I passed in retirement, when the weather was fair; sometimes in the thickest woods, sometimes on the highest hills, where almost every step varied the prospect. It has been my custom, for many years, to perform my devotional

exercises *sub dio*, when I have opportunity; and I always find these rural scenes have some tendency both to refresh and to compose my spirits. A beautiful diversified prospect gladdens my heart. When I am withdrawn from the noise and petty works of men, I consider myself as in the great temple which the Lord has built for his own honour.

The country between Rochester and Maidstone, bordering upon the Medway, was well suited to the turn of my mind; and was I to go over it now, I could point to many a place where I remember to have either earnestly sought, or happily found the Lord's comfortable presence with my soul. And thus I lived, sometimes in London, and sometimes in the country, till the autumn of the following year. All this while I had two trials more or less upon my mind: the first and principal was Mrs. N*****'s illness; she still grew worse, and I had daily more reason to fear that the hour of separation was at hand. When faith was in exercise, I was in some measure resigned to the Lord's will; but too often my heart rebelled, and I found it hard either to trust or to submit. I had likewise some care about my future settlement: The African trade was overdone that year, and my friends did not care to fit out another ship till mine returned. I was some time in suspense; but indeed a provision of food and raiment has seldom been a cause of great solicitude to me. I found it easier to trust the Lord in this point than in the former; and accordingly this was first answered. In August I received an account, that I was nominated to the office of ———. These places are usually obtained, or at least sought, by dint of much interest and application; but this came to me unsought and unexpected. I knew, indeed, my good friend in L—— had endea-

voured to procure another post for me, but found it pre-engaged. I found afterwards, that the place I had missed would have been very unsuitable for me; and that this which I had no thought of, was the very thing I could have wished for, as it afforded me much leisure, and the liberty of living in my own way. Several circumstances, unnoticed by others, concurred to show me, that the good hand of the Lord was as remarkably concerned in this event, as in any other leading turn of my life.

But when I gained this point, my distress in the other was doubled: I was obliged to leave Mrs. N***** in the greatest extremity of pain and illness, when the physicians could do no more, and I had no ground of hope that I should see her again alive, but this,—that nothing is impossible with the Lord. I had a severe conflict; but faith prevailed: I found the promise remarkably fulfilled, of strength proportioned to my need. The day before I set out, and not till then, the burden was entirely taken from my mind; I was strengthened to resign both her and myself to the Lord's disposal, and departed from her in a cheerful frame. Soon after I was gone, she began to amend, and recovered so fast, that in about two months I had the pleasure to meet her at Stone, on her journey to L——.

And now I think I have answered, if not exceeded your desire. Since October 1755, we have been comfortably settled here; and all my circumstances have been as remarkably smooth and uniform, as they were various in former years. My trials have been light and few;—not but that I still find, in the experience of every day, the necessity of a life of faith. My principal trial is—the body of sin and death, which makes me often to sigh out the Apostle's complaint, "O

" wretched man!" but with him likewise I can say, " I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord." I live in a barren land, where the knowledge and power of the Gospel is very low: yet here are a few of the Lord's people; and this wilderness has been a useful school to me, where I have studied more leisurely the truths I gathered up in London. I brought down with me a considerable stock of notional truth; but I have since found, that there is no effectual teacher but God; that we can receive no further than he is pleased to communicate; and that no knowledge is truly useful to me, but what is made my own by experience. Many things I thought I had learned, would not stand in an hour of temptation, till I had in this way learned them over again. Since the year 1757, I have had an increasing acquaintance in the West-riding of Yorkshire, where the Gospel flourishes greatly. This has been a good school to me: I have conversed at large among all parties, without joining any; and in my attempts to hit the *golden mean,* I have sometimes been drawn too near the different extremes; yet the Lord has enabled me to profit by my mistakes. In brief, I am still a learner, and the Lord still condescends to teach me. I begin at length to see that I have attained but very little; but I trust in him to carry on his own work in my soul, and by all the dispensations of his grace and providence, to increase my knowledge of him, and of myself.

When I was fixed in a house, and found my business would afford me much leisure time, I considered in what manner I should improve it. And now having reason to close with the Apostle's determination, " to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucifi- " ed," I devoted my life to the prosecution of spiritual

knowledge, and resolved to pursue nothing but in subservience to this main design. This resolution divorced me, (as I have already hinted,) from the classics and mathematics. My first attempt was to learn so much Greek as would enable me to understand the New Testament and Septuagint; and when I had made some progress this way, I entered upon the Hebrew the following year; and two years afterwards, having surmised some advantages from the Syriac version, I began with that language. You must not think that I have attained, or ever aimed at, a critical skill in any of these: I had no business with them, but as in reference to something else. I never read one classic author in the Greek; I thought it too late in life to take such a round in this language as I had done in the Latin. I only wanted the signification of scriptural words and phrases; and for this I thought I might avail myself of *Scapula*, the *Synopsis*, and others, who had sustained the drudgery before me. In the Hebrew, I can read the historical books and psalms, with tolerable ease; but in the prophetical and difficult parts, I am frequently obliged to have recourse to *lexicons*, &c. However, I know so much as to be able, with such helps as are at hand, to judge for myself the meaning of any passage I have occasion to consult. Beyond this I do not think of proceeding, if I can find better employment; for I would rather be some way useful to others, than die with the reputation of an eminent linguist.

Together with these studies, I have kept up a course of reading of the best writers in divinity that have come to my hand, in the Latin and English tongues, and some French, (for I picked up the French at times while I used the sea.) But within these two or three years,

I have accustomed myself chiefly to writing, and have not found time to read many books besides the Scriptures.

I am the more particular in this account, as my case has been something singular; for in all my literary attempts, I have been obliged to strike out my own path, by the light I could acquire from books, as I have not had a teacher or assistant since I was ten years of age.

One word concerning my views to the *ministry*, and I have done.——I have told you, that this was my dear mother's hope concerning me; but her death, and the scenes of life in which I afterwards engaged, seemed to cut off the probability. The first desires of this sort in my own mind, arose many years ago, from a reflection on Gal. i. 23, 24. "But they had heard only, that he "which persecuted us in times past, now preacheth the "faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified "God in me."——I could not but wish for such a public opportunity to testify the riches of divine grace. I thought I was, above most living, a fit person to proclaim that faithful saying, "That Jesus Christ came "into the world to save the chief of sinners:" and as my life had been full of remarkable turns, and I seemed selected to show what the Lord could do, I was in some hopes, that, perhaps, sooner or later, he might call me into this service.

I believe it was a distant hope of this that determined me to study the original Scriptures; but it remained an imperfect desire in my own breast, till it was recommended to me by some Christian friends. I started at the thought, when first seriously proposed to me; but afterwards set apart some weeks to consider the case, to consult my friends, and to entreat the Lord's direction.—The judgment of my friends, and many

things that occurred, tended to engage me. My first thought was to join the Dissenters, from a presumption that I could not honestly make the required subscriptions; but Mr. C——, in a conversation upon these points, moderated my scruples; and preferring the established church in some other respects, I accepted a title from him some months afterwards, and solicited ordination from the late archbishop of York. I need not tell you I met a refusal, nor what steps I took afterwards to succeed elsewhere. At present I desist from my applications. My desire to serve the Lord is not weakened; but I am not so hasty to push myself forward as I was formerly. It is sufficient that he knows how to dispose of me, and that he both can and will do what is best. To him I commend myself: I trust that his will and my true interest are inseparable. To his name be glory for ever. And thus I conclude my story, and presume you will acknowledge I have been particular enough. I have room for no more, but to repeat, that I am, &c.

February 2, 1763.

FORTY-ONE LETTERS

ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS,

NAMELY,

1. On Trust in God.
2. To a Student in Divinity.
3. On 2 Cor. v. 10. and Rom. xiv. 12.
4. On Family-Worship.
5. On the Difficulties attending the Ministry.
6. On the Influence of Faith.
7. On a Ministerial Address to the Unconverted.
8. On the inward Witness.
9. On Election and Perseverance.
10. On Grace in the Blade.
11. On Grace in the Ear.
12. On Grace in the Full Corn.
13. On Hearing Sermons.
14. On Temptation.
15. A Plan of a Christian Library.
16. On the Inefficacy of Knowledge
17. On a Believer's Frames.
18. On Social Prayer.
19. On Controversy.
20. On Conformity to the World.
21. On Spiritual Blindness.
22. On a State of Poverty.
23. On Simplicity and Sincerity.
24. On Communion with God.
25. On Faith, and the Communion of Saints.
26. On Gospel-Illumination.
27. On Union with Christ.
28. On the Divine Guidance.
29. On Rom. viii. 19, 20, 21.
30. On the right Use of the Law.
31. On Love to the Brethren.
32. On Candour.
33. (1) On Man in his Fallen Estate.
34. (2) On Man in his Fallen Estate.
35. On Phil. iv. 8.
36. To a Friend on Recovery from Illness.
37. On Christian Experience.
38. On Religion necessary to the Enjoyments of Life.
39. A word in Season
40. To Professors in Trade.
41. On the Ministry of Angels.

LETTER I.

On Trust in the Providence of God, and Benevolence to his Poor.

My Dear Friend,

THE more I think of the point you proposed to me, the more I am confirmed to renew the advice I then gave. There is doubtless such a thing as Christian prudence; but, my friend, beware of counterfeits. Self-love and the evil heart of unbelief, will endeavour to obtrude upon us a prudence, so called, which is as opposite to the former as darkness to light. I do not say, that, now you have a wife, and the prospect of a family, you are strictly *bound* to communicate with the poor in the same proportion as formerly. I say, you are not *bound;* for every thing of this sort should proceed from a willing mind. But if you should tell me, the Lord has given you such a zeal for his glory, such a concern for the honour of the Gospel, such a love to his members, such a grateful sense of his mercies, (especially by granting you, in this late instance of your marriage, the desire of your heart,) and such an affiance in his providence and promises, that you find yourself very unwilling to be one sixpence in the year less useful than you was before, I could not blame you or dissuade you from it. But I do not absolutely advise it; because I know not the state of your mind, or what measure of faith the Lord has given you. Only this I believe, that when the Lord gives such a confidence, he will not disappoint it.

When I look among the professors, yea, among the ministers of the Gospel, there are few things I see a more general want of, than such a trust in God as to temporals, and such a sense of the honour of being permitted to relieve the necessities of his people, as might dispose them to a more liberal distribution of what they have at present in their power, and to a reliance on him for a sufficient supply in future. Some exceptions there are. Some persons I have the happiness to know whose chief pleasure it seems to be, to devise liberal things. For the most part, we take care, first, to be well supplied, if possible, with all the necessaries, conveniencies, and not a few of the elegancies of life; then to have a snug fund laid up against a rainy day, as the phrase is, (if this is in an increasing way, so much the better,) that when we look at children and near relatives, we may say to our hearts, "Now they are well provided for." And when we have gotten all this and more, we are perhaps content, for the love of Christ, to bestow a pittance of our superfluities, a tenth or twentieth part of what we spend or hoard up for ourselves, upon the poor. But, alas! what do we herein more than others? Multitudes who know nothing of the love of Christ, will do thus much, yea, perhaps, greatly exceed us, from the mere feelings of humanity.

But it may be asked, would you show no regard to the possibility of leaving your wife or children unprovided for? Quite the reverse: I would have you attend to it very much; and behold, the Scriptures show you the more excellent way. If you had a little money to spare, would you not lend it to me, if I assured you it should be repaid when wanted? I can point out to you better interest and better security than I could possibly give you: Prov. xix. 17. "He that hath pity upon the

" poor, lendeth unto the Lord : and that which he hath " given, will he pay him again." What think you of this text? Is it the word of God, or not? Is he worthy of belief, or not? Is he able to make good his word, or is he not? I dare stake all my interest in your friendship, (which I should be very loath to forfeit,) that if you act upon this maxim, in a spirit of prayer and faith, and with a single eye to his glory, you shall not be disappointed. Read over Matth. vi. 26—34. Shall we confine that reasoning and those promises to the primitive times? Say not, " If the Lord would make windows in heaven this thing might be." He has more ways to bless and prosper those who trust in him, than we are able to point out to him. But I tell you, my friend, he will sooner make windows in heaven, turn stones into bread, yea, stop the sun in his course, than he will suffer those who conscientiously serve him, and depend upon him, to be destitute.

Some instances we have had of ministers who have seemed to transgress the bounds of strict prudence in their attention to the poor. But they have been men of faith, prayer, and zeal; if they did it, not from a caprice of humour, or a spirit of indolence, but from such motives as the Scripture suggests and recommends, I believe their families have seldom suffered for it. I wish you to consult upon this head, what Mrs. Alleine says, in the affecting account she has given of that honoured and faithful servant of God, her husband, Joseph Alleine. Besides, you know not what you may actually *save* in the course of years by this method. The apostle, speaking of some abuses that obtained in the church of Corinth, says, " For this cause many " are sick among you." If prudence should shut up the bowels of your compassion, (which I trust it never

will,) the Lord might quarter an apothecary upon your family, which would perhaps cost you twice the money that would have sufficed to refresh his people, and to commend your ministry and character.

But if, after all, prudence will be heard, I counsel you to do these two things. First, Be very certain that you allow yourselves in nothing superfluous. You cannot, I trust, in conscience think of laying out one penny more than is barely decent; unless you have another penny to help the poor. Then, secondly, Let your friends who are in good circumstances, be plainly told, that, though you love them, prudence, and the necessary charge of a family, will not permit you to entertain them; no, not for a night. What! say you, shut my door against my friends? Yes, by all means, rather than against Christ. If the Lord Jesus was again upon earth in a state of humiliation, and he, and the best friend you have, standing at your door, and your provision so strait that you could not receive both, which would you entertain? Now, he says of the poor, "Inasmuch as "ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it "unto me." Your friends have houses of their own, and money to pay at an inn, if you do not take them in; but the poor need relief. One would almost think that passage, Luke xiv. 12—14. was not considered as a part of God's word; at least I believe there is no one passage so generally neglected by his own people. I do not think it unlawful to entertain our friends; but if these words do not teach us, that it is in some respects our duty to give a preference to the poor, I am at a loss to understand them.

I was enabled to set out upon the plan I recommend to you, at a time when my certain income was much too scanty for my own provision, and before I had the ex-

pectation or promise of assistance from any person upon earth. Only I knew that the Lord *could* provide me with whatever he saw needful; and I trusted, that if he kept me dependent upon himself, and desirous to live for his service only, he assuredly would do so. I have as yet seen no cause to repent it. I live upon his promise; for as to any present ways or means, every thing here below is so uncertain, that I consider myself in the same situation with the birds of the air, who have neither storehouse nor barn. To-day I have enough for myself, and something to impart to them that need; as to futurity, the Lord must provide; and for the most part I can believe he will. I can tell you, however, that now and then my heart is pinched; unbelief creeps in, and self would much rather choose a strong box, or what the world calls a *certainty*, than a life of absolute dependence upon the providence of God. However, in my composed hours I am well satisfied. Hitherto he has graciously taken care of me; therefore may my heart trust in him, and not be afraid.

Consider, my friend, the Lord has done well for *you* likewise. He has settled you peaceably in a good and honourable interest; he has now answered your prayers, in giving you a partner, with whom you may take sweet counsel, one that will help and strengthen you in your best desires. Beware, therefore, of that reasoning which might lead you to distrust the Lord your God, or to act as if you did. You complain that there is too much of an expensive taste among some persons in your congregation. If you set yourself to discountenance this, and should at the same time too closely shut up your hands, they will be ready to charge you with being governed by the same worldly spirit, though in another form. If you have been hi-

therto tender and bountiful to the poor, and should make too great and too sudden an alteration in this respect, if the blame should not fall upon you, it probably would upon your wife, who, I believe, would be far from deserving it. If the house which has been open to the poor in former times, should be shut against them now you live in it, would it not lead the people's thoughts back? Would it not open the mouths of those who do not love your ministry, to say, That notwithstanding all your zeal about doctrines, you know how to take care of your own interest, as well as those whom you have thought indifferent and lukewarm in the cause of the Gospel? Would it not? But I forbear. I know you need not such arguments. Yet consider how many eyes are upon you, watching for your halting. Now, at your first setting out, is the proper time seriously to seek the Lord's directions, that you may, from the beginning, adopt such a plan as may be most to your own comfort, the honour of your character as a minister, the glory of him who has called you, and the edification of your people. It is easier to begin well, than to make alterations afterwards. I trust the Lord will guide and bless you in your deliberations. And for my own part, I am not in the least afraid that you will ever have cause to blame me for the advice I have given, if you should be disposed to follow it.

I have given you my opinion freely, and perhaps with an appearance of more strictness than is necessary. But I would apply our Lord's words in another case to this: "All men cannot receive this saying; he that is able to "receive it, let him receive it." If the Lord has given you this confidence in his word, you are happy. It is better than the possession of thousands by the year.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

Extract of a Letter to a Student in Divinity.

Dear Sir,

THE subject of your last is important. I can sympathize with your anxiety, having known much of it myself, and therefore willingly devote my first leisure to your service. But shall I indeed condole with you? or shall I rather congratulate you on the perplexity you complain of? I know it is not pleasing; but I hope it will be sanctified and profitable to you.

Though I am no enemy to the acquisition of useful knowledge, I have seen many instances of young men who have been much hurt by what they expected to reap advantage from. They have gone to the academy humble, peaceable, spiritual, and lively; but have come out self-wise, dogmatical, censorious, and full of a prudence founded upon the false maxims of the world. I have been ready to address them with that line of Milton:

"If thou art he—But ah! how fall'n!"

I do not mention this as the necessary fault of the institution, but as the frequent effect of notions too hastily picked up, when not sanctified by grace, nor balanced by a proportionable depth of spiritual experience. I am therefore glad to hear, that notwithstanding the advantages you have had in the pursuit of your studies, you feel an inward conviction, that you

still need something which you cannot receive from men or books, in order to complete your fitness for the ministry; that you may be "a workman that needs "not to be ashamed," and enabled rightly to divide, (to distinguish and distribute,) the word of truth.

It seems to me a point of more curiosity than use, to inquire too nicely into the *modus* of the Holy Spirit's assistance in the composure and delivery of sermons. If we cannot exactly state the boundaries between what we may deem the result of our own thoughts, and the needful influence of the Holy Spirit, it seems a safe way to give him the honour of the whole, and to attribute nothing to ourselves but our infirmities. If we have a capacity, means for improvement, diligence to make use of those means, and if that diligence is attended with any degree of success; may we not acknowledge, that the former links of this chain are the effect of his goodness and favour no less than the latter?

To the question, How far is it lawful to expect this assistance? I answer, It is lawful very far, even to lay the whole stress upon it, so as to be firmly persuaded that we can neither meditate or speak to purpose without it; that if we have not this assistance, whatever else we have, or may think we have, we shall but "darken "counsel by words without knowledge." For this, I think, I have warrant in John xv. 5. If any person supposes he has so far mastered a system of divinity, that though he can indeed *do better* with the Spirit's assistance, yet he can make a tolerable shift without it, I envy him not this attainment.

But if the question intends, How far a dependence upon the Holy Spirit may lawfully supersede the use of means? I answer, Not in the least. The blessing

and the means are so closely united, that they cannot be separated. The blessing may be surely expected, if diligently sought in the use of proper means, and we have no just reason to expect it without them. But to clear up the whole, let it be considered, what may deserve the name of diligence in this matter? and what are the proper means?

By diligence, I understand *Spiritual diligence.* Such an active, improving, industrious habit, as is peculiar to a heart impressed with some real abiding sense of the love of God, the worth of souls, the shortness of time, and the importance of eternity. Without this turn of mind, though a man should spend sixteen hours every day in his study, he may be a mere trifler. The greatest part of his application will be spent on what is least necessary, and his knowledge will chiefly prove of that sort which puffeth up, without communicating any real benefit: Gen. xli. 21.; Psalm cxxvii. 2.

The chief means for attaining wisdom, and suitable gifts for the ministry, are the holy Scriptures, and prayer. The one is the fountain of living water, the other the bucket with which we are to draw. And I believe you will find, by observation, that the man who is most frequent and fervent in prayer, and most devoted to the word of God, will shine and flourish above his fellows. Next to these, and derived from them, is meditation. By this, I do not mean a stated exercise upon some one particular subject, so much as a disposition of mind to observe carefully what passes within us and around us, what we see, hear, and feel, and to apply all for the illustration and confirmation of the written word to us. In the use of these means, and an humble dependence upon the Lord in all the changing dispensations we pass through, our spiritual experience

will enlarge; and this experience is the proper fund of our ministerial capacity, so far as it may be considered inherent in us: Prov. xvi. 23.; Matth. xiii. 52.; 1 John i. 3.

These means are of universal importance. The wisest can do nothing without them; the weakest shall not use them in vain. There are likewise subordinate means, which may be helpful, and should in general be attended to. Yet they ought not, I apprehend, to be considered as a *sine qua non* in a minister's call and fitness. The first preachers had them not, and some in the present day are enabled to do well without them. Under this head, I principally intend all that comes under the usual denomination of literature. A competent acquaintance with the learned languages, history, natural philosophy, &c. is very desirable. If these things are held in a proper subserviency, if they do not engross too much of our time, nor add fuel to the fire of that self-importance which is our great snare; they may contribute to increase and enlarge our ideas, and facilitate our expressing ourselves with propriety. But these attainments, (like riches,) are attended with their peculiar temptations; and unless they are under the regulation of a sound judgment, and a spiritual frame of mind, will prove, (like Saul's armour to David,) rather cumbersome than useful in preaching. The sermons of preachers thus qualified are often more ingenious than edifying, and rather set off the man, than commend the Gospel of Christ.

As you desire my advice with respect to your future studies, I shall comply without hesitation or ceremony.

The original Scriptures well deserve your pains, and will richly repay them. There is doubtless a beauty, fulness, and spirit, in the originals, which the best

translations do not always express. When a word or phrase admits of various senses, the translators can only preserve *one;* and it is not to be supposed, unless they were perfectly under the influence of the same infallible Spirit, that they should always prefer the best. Only be upon your guard, lest you should be tempted to think, that because you are master of the grammatical construction, and can tell the several acceptations of the words in the best authors, you are therefore and thereby master of the spiritual sense likewise. This you must derive from your experimental knowledge, and the influence and teaching of the Spirit of God.

Another thing which will much assist you in composing and speaking properly and acceptably, is logic. This will teach you what properly belongs to your subject, and what may be best suppressed; and likewise to explain, divide, enumerate, and range your ideas to advantage. A lax, immethodical, disproportionate manner, is to be avoided. Yet, beware of the contrary extreme. An affected starchness and over accuracy will fetter you, will make your discourses lean and dry, preclude an useful variety, and savour more of the school-lamp, than of that heavenly fire which alone can make our meditations efficacious and profitable, either to ourselves or our hearers. The proper medium can hardly be taught by rule; experience, observation, and prayer, are the best guides.

As your inquiry seems chiefly to be, How to fill up your outlines; I would advise you to study the living as well as the dead, or rather more. Converse much with experienced Christians and exercised souls. You will find advantage in this respect, not only from the wise, but from the weak of the flock. In the course of your acquaintance, you will meet with some in a

backsliding state, some under temptations, some walking in darkness, others rejoicing in the light, &c. Observe how their spirits work, what they say, and how they reason in their several cases; what methods and arguments you find most successful in comforting the feeble-minded, raising up those who are cast down, and the like, and what answers they return. Compare these with the word of God, and your own heart. What you observe of ten persons in these different situations, may be applied to ten thousand. For though some circumstances vary, the heart of man, the aids of grace, and the artifices of Satan, in general, are universally the same. And whenever you are to preach, remember, that some of all these sorts will probably be before you, and each should have something said to their own peculiar case

The tempted and distressed will be most probably relieved, by opening the various states and exercises of the heart, and by showing from scriptural and other examples, that no new thing has befallen them. The careless and backsliders, who have made a profession, should be reminded of that blessedness they once spoke of, and warned of their danger. Those who are now upon the mount, should be cautioned to expect a change, and to guard against security and spiritual pride. To the dead in trespasses and sins, (some such will be always present,) it is needful to preach the spirituality and sanction of the law, that they may be stirred up to seek to Jesus. Of *him* all *awakened* souls love to hear much. Let him therefore be your capital subject. If you discuss some less essential topic, or bend all your strength to clear up some dark text, though you should display much learning and ingenuity, you will probably fall short of your main design,

which I dare say will be to promote the glory of God, and the good of souls.

You will likewise find advantage, by attending as much as you can on those preachers whom God has blessed with much power, life, and success in their ministry. And in this you will do well not to confine yourself to any denomination or party, for the Spirit of the Lord is not confined. Different men have different gifts and talents. I would not wish you to be a slavish admirer of any man. Christ alone is our master and teacher. But study the excellencies of each; and if you observe a fault in any, (for no human models are perfect,) you will see what you are yourself to avoid.

Your inquiries respecting my own experience on this subject, must be answered very briefly. I have long since learnt, that if I was ever to be a minister, faith and prayer must make me one. I desire to seek the Lord's direction, both in the choice and management of subjects; but I do not expect it in a way of extraordinary impulse, but in endeavouring to avail myself, to the best of my judgment, of present circumstances.—The converse I have with my people, usually suggests what I am to preach to them. At first, my chief solicitude used to be, what I should find to say: I hope it is now, rather, that I may not speak in vain. For the Lord has sent me here, not to acquire the character of a ready speaker, but to win souls to Christ, and to edify his people. As to preparation, I make little use of books, excepting the Bible and Concordance. Though I preach without notes, I most frequently write more or less upon the subject. Often when I begin, I am at a loss how I shall proceed; but one thing insensibly offers after another, and, in general, I believe the best and

most useful parts of my sermon occur *de novo* while I am preaching. This reminds me of Luther's maxim, *Bene precásse est bene studuisse.* When I can find my heart in frame and liberty for prayer, every thing else is comparatively easy.

I should be very glad if any thing I have offered may afford you satisfaction. The sum of my advice is this: Examine your heart and views. Can you appeal to him who knows all things, concerning the sincerity of your aim, that you devote yourself to the work of the ministry, not for worldly regards, but with an humble desire to promote the Redeemer's kingdom? If so, and his providence has thus far concurred with you, trust him for your sufficiency of every kind, and he will not disappoint you, but will be near to strengthen you according to your day. Depend not upon any cisterns you can hew out for yourself, but rejoice that you have liberty to come to the fountain that is always full, and always flowing. You must not expect a mechanical sufficiency, such as artificers acquire by habit and exercise in their business. When you have preached well nineteen times, this will be no security for the twentieth. Yea, when you have been upheld for twenty years, should the Lord withhold his hand, you would be as much at a loss as at first.

If you lean upon books or men, or upon your own faculties and attainments, you will be in fear and in danger of falling continually. But if you stay yourself upon the Lord, he will not only make good your expectations, but in time will give you a becoming confidence in his goodness, and free you from your present anxiety.

One thing more I must mention as belonging to the subject: That a comfortable freedom for public ser-

vice depends much upon the spirituality of our walk before God and man. Wisdom will not dwell with a trifling, an assuming, a censorious, or a worldly spirit. But if it is our business, and our pleasure, to contemplate Jesus, and to walk in his steps, he will bless us, we shall be like trees planted by a constant stream, and he will prosper the work of our hands.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

A Letter to a Friend, on the Question, Whether the Sins of Believers shall be publicly declared at the great Day? Or how are we to understand the Apostle's Assertion, "We "must all appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ; "that every one may receive the Things done in his Body, "according to that he hath done, whether it be good or "bad?" 2 Cor. v. 10. compared with Rom. xiv. 12.

My Dear Sir,

MY heart congratulates you. What changes and events many in younger life may be reserved to see, who can tell? but your pilgrimage is nearly finished.—You stand upon the river's brink, with the city full in view, waiting and wishing for the appointed hour: you need not be anxious concerning your passage, for every circumstance attending it is already adjusted by infinite wisdom and love, and the King himself will be ready to receive you. While you continue here, I am glad to hear from you, and should be glad to contribute in any way or degree to your satisfaction, or even to show my willingness, if I can do no more. I can propose little more than the latter, by offering my thoughts on

the subject you propose from 2 Cor. v. 10. and the apparent difficulty of understanding that passage, in full harmony with the many texts which seem expressly to assert, that the sins of believers are so forgiven as to be remembered no more.

There is doubtless, (as you observe,) a perfect consistence in every part of the word of God; the difficulties we meet with are wholly owing to the narrowness of our faculties, and the ignorance which in some degree is inseparable from our present state of imperfection. And we may, in general, rest satisfied with the thought that there is a bright moment approaching, when the veil shall be wholly taken away. It is the part of faith to rest upon the plain declarations of Scripture, without indulging a blameable curiosity of knowing more than is clearly revealed; yet while we humbly depend upon divine teaching, it is right to aim at as enlarged a sense of what is revealed as we can attain to. Every acquisition of this kind is more valuable than gold, especially respecting those points which have an immediate tendency to comfort and support us under the view of an approaching dissolution; the question you have proposed is undoubtedly of this nature.

May the Lord direct my thoughts and pen, that I may not "darken counsel by words without know-"ledge!"—I have been looking over the passage you refer to in Dr. Ridgley, and think I might be well excused from saying any thing further on the subject, as he hath briefly and fully stated all the arguments that have occurred to me on either side of the question, and closes with a proper caution not to be peremptory in determining, lest by attempting to be wise above what is written, I should betray my own folly.—Yet as you desire to have my thoughts, I must say something.—I

wish I may not give you reason to think that this caution has been lost upon me.

I think all the great truths in which we are concerned, are clearly and expressly laid down, not only in one, but in many places of Scripture; but it sometimes happens, that here and there we meet with a text, which, in the first and obvious sound of the words, seems to speak differently from what is asserted more largely elsewhere; which texts, singly taken, afford some men their only ground for the hypothesis they maintain. Thus the Arians lay a great stress on John xiv. 28. and the Arminians on James ii. 24. &c. But their true interpretation is to be sought according to the analogy of faith. They are capable of a sense agreeable to the others, though the others are not intelligible in the sense they would fix upon these. In like manner I would say, whatever may be the precise meaning of 2 Cor. v. 10. we are sure it cannot be designed to weaken what we are taught in almost every page, of the free, absolute, and unalterable nature of a believer's justification; the benefit of which, as to the forgiveness of sin, is signified by the phrases of "blotting out,"—"not remembering,"—"casting behind the back,"—and "into the depths of the sea."—The sins of a believer are so effectually removed, that even when, or if they are sought for, they cannot be found. For Jesus has borne them away: believers are complete in him, and clothed in his righteousness.—They shall stand before God without spot or wrinkle. Who shall lay any thing to their charge?

But it is probable that those stray expressions chiefly, if not entirely, respect the guilt, imputation, and deserved consequences of sin.—None can suppose that the Lord will or *can* forget the sins of his people, or

that they can be ever hid from his all comprehending view. Neither can I think they themselves will forget them. Their song is founded upon a recollection of their sins and their circumstances in this life, Rev. v. 9. and their love, and consequently their happiness, seems inseparably connected with the consciousness of what they were, and what they had done, Luke vii. 47. And I think those are the sweetest moments in this life, when we have the clearest sense of our own sins, provided the sense of our acceptance in the Beloved is proportionably clear, and we feel the consolations of his love, notwithstanding all our transgressions. When we arrive in glory, unbelief and fear will cease for ever; our nearness to God, and communion with him, will be unspeakably beyond what we can now conceive. Therefore the remembrance of our sins will be no abatement of our bliss, but rather the contrary. When Pharaoh and his host were alive, and pursuing them, the Israelites were terrified; but afterwards, when they saw their enemies dead upon the shore, their joy and triumph were not abated, but heightened, by the consideration of their number.

With respect to our sins being made known to others, I acknowledge with you, that I could not now bear to have any of my fellow-creatures made acquainted with what passes in my heart for a single day; but I apprehend it is a part and a proof of my present depravity, that I feel myself disposed to pay so great a regard to the judgment of men, while I am so little affected with what I am in the sight of the pure and holy God. But I believe that hereafter, when self shall be entirely rooted out, and my will perfectly united to the divine will, I should feel no reluctance, supposing it for the manifestation of his glorious grace, that men, angels, and devils,

should know the very worst of me. Whether it will be so or no, I dare not determine. Perhaps the difficulty chiefly lies in the necessity of our being at present taught heavenly things by earthly. In the descriptions we have of the great day, allusion is made to what is most solemn in human transactions. The ideas of the judgment-seat, the great trumpet, of the books being opened, and the pleadings, Matth. xxv. 37—44. seem to be borrowed from the customs that obtained amongst men to help our weak conceptions, rather than justly and fully to describe what will be the real process.—Now, when we attempt to look into the unseen world, we carry our ideas of time and place, and sensible objects, along with us; and we cannot divest ourselves of them, or provide ourselves with better: yet perhaps they have as little relation to the objects we aim at, as the ideas which a man born blind acquires from what he hears and feels, have to the true nature of light and colours. Mr. Locke mentions one, who, after much thought and conversation, supposed he had got a tolerable notion of *scarlet*, and that it was something nearly resembling the sound of a trumpet. Perhaps this is no improper emblem of the utmost we can attain to, when we are endeavouring to realize the solemnities of the judgment-day. What we mean by memory and reasoning, may possibly have no place in the world of spirits. We guess at something more suitable, perhaps, when we use the term *intuition*. But I apprehend we must die before we can fully understand what it signifies: perhaps thoughts may be as intelligible there as words are here.

In a word, my dear Sir, if I have not given you satisfaction, (I am sure I have not satisfied myself,) accept my apology in the words of a much wiser, and an inspired man: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me:

" it is high, I cannot attain unto it." Ere long we shall know: in the mean while our cause is in sure hands; we have a Shepherd who will guide us below, an Advocate who will receive and present us before the throne above. I trust we meet daily before the throne of grace, hereafter we shall meet in glory. The paper will allow no more.

Believe me yours in the Lord, &c.

LETTER IV.

To Theron, on Family-worship.

Sir,

A NEGLECT of family-prayer, is, I am afraid, too common amongst professors in this day. I am glad that you consider it both as a duty and a privilege, and are by grace determined, that when you shall commence master of a family, you will worship God with all your house. It was Abraham's commendation, that he not only served the Lord himself, but was solicitous that his children and household might serve him likewise. I trust that he who inclines your heart to walk in the footsteps of faithful Abraham, will bless you in the attempt, and give you peace in your dwelling; a mercy which is seldom enjoyed, which indeed can hardly be expected, by those families which call not upon the Lord.

Though I readily comply with your request, and should be glad if I can offer any thing that may assist or animate you in your good purpose, I am afraid I shall not answer your expectations with regard to the parti-

culars of your inquiry, concerning the most proper method of conducting family-worship. The circumstances of families are so various, that no determinate rules can be laid down, nor has the word of God prescribed any; because, being of universal obligation, it is wisely and graciously accommodated to suit the different situations of his people. You must therefore, as to circumstantials, judge for yourself. You will do well to pursue such a method as you shall find most convenient to yourself and family, without scrupulously binding yourself, when the Scripture has left you free.

We have no positive precept enjoining us any set time for prayer, nor even how often we should pray, either in public or private; though the expressions of "continuing instant in prayer," "praying without ceas-"ing," and the like, plainly intimate that prayer should be frequent. Daniel prayed three times a-day; which the Psalmist speaks of as his practice likewise; and in one place declares his purpose of praising God seven times a-day. This last expression is perhaps indefinite, not precisely seven times, but very often. Indeed, a person who lives in the exercise of faith and love, and who finds by experience that it is good for him to draw nigh to God, will not want to be told how often he must pray, any more than how often he must converse with an earthly friend. Those whom we love, we love to be much with. Love is the best casuist, and either resolves or prevents a thousand scruples and questions, which may perplex those who only serve God from principles of constraint and fear. And a believer will account those his happiest days, when he has most leisure and most liberty of spirit for the exercise of prayer. However, I think family-prayer cannot be said to be *stated*, unless it be performed at least

daily, and, when unavoidable hindrances do not prevent, twice a-day. Though all times and seasons are alike to the Lord, and his ear is always open whenever we have a heart to call upon him; yet to *us* there is a peculiar suitableness in beginning and closing the day with prayer: in the morning, to acknowledge his goodness in our preservation through the night, and entreat his presence and blessing on our persons and callings in the course of the day; and at night, to praise him for the mercies of the day past, to humble ourselves before him for what has been amiss, to wait on him for a renewed manifestation of his pardoning love, and to commit ourselves and our concerns to his care and protection while we sleep. You will, of course, choose those hours when you are least liable to be incommoded by the calls of business, and when the family can assemble with the most convenience; only I would observe, that it greatly preserves regularity and good order in a house, to keep constantly to the same hours when it is practicable; and likewise, that it is best not to defer evening-prayer till late, if it can be well avoided; lest some who join in the exercise, and perhaps the person himslf who leads in it, should be too weary or sleepy to give a due attention. On this account, I should advise to have family-prayer before supper, where people have the choice and disposal of their own hours.

I think, with you, that it is very expedient and proper that reading a portion of the word of God should be ordinarily a part of our family-worship; so likewise to sing a hymn or psalm, or part of one, at discretion; provided there are some persons in the family who have enough of a musical ear and voice to conduct the singing in a tolerable manner; otherwise perhaps it may be better omitted. If you read and sing, as well as pray,

care should be taken that the combined services do not run into an inconvenient length.

The chief thing to be attended to is, that it may be a spiritual service; and the great evil to be dreaded and guarded against in the exercise of every duty that returns frequently upon us, is formality. If a stated course of family-prayer is kept up as constantly in its season as the striking of the clock, it may come in time to be almost as mechanically performed, unless we are continually looking to the Lord to keep our hearts alive. It most frequently happens, that one or more members of a family are unconverted persons. When there are such present, a great regard should be had to them, and every thing conducted with a view to their edification, that they may not be disgusted or wearied, or tempted to think that it is little more than the fashion or custom of the house; which will probably be the case, unless the master of the family is lively and earnest in performance of the duty, and likewise circumspect and consistent in every part of his behaviour at other times. By leading in the worship of God before children, servants, or strangers, a man gives bond, (as it were,) for his behaviour, and adds strength to every other motive which should engage him to abstain from all appearance of evil. It should be a constant check upon our language and tempers in the presence of our families, to consider that we began the day, and propose to end it with them in prayer. The apostle Peter uses this argument to influence the conduct of husbands and wives towards each other; and it is equally applicable to all the members of a family; "That "your prayers be not hindered:" that is, either prevented and put off, or despoiled of all life and efficacy by the ferment of sinful passions. On the other hand,

the proper exercise of family-prayer, when recommended by a suitable deportment, is a happy means of instructing children and servants in the great truths of religion, of softening their prejudices, and inspiring them with a temper of respect and affection, which will dispose them to cheerful obedience, and make them unwilling to grieve or offend. In this instance, as in every other, we may observe, that the Lord's commands to his people are not arbitrary appointments, but that, so far as they are conscientiously complied with, they have an evident tendency and suitableness to promote our own advantage. He requires us to acknowledge him in our families, for our own sakes; not because he has need of our poor services, but because we have need of his blessing, and without the influence of his grace, (which is promised to all who seek it,) are sure to be unhappy in ourselves and in all our connexions.

When husband and wife are happily partakers of the same faith, it seems expedient, and for their mutual good, that, besides their private devotions, and joining in family-prayer, they should pray together. They have many wants, mercies, and concerns, in common with each other, and distinct from the rest of the family. The manner in which they should improve a little time in this joint exercise, cannot well be prescribed by a third person; yet I will venture to suggest one thing; and the rather, as I do not remember to have met with it in print. I conceive that it may prove much to their comfort to pray alternately, not only the husband with and for the wife, but the wife with and for the husband. The Spirit of God, by the Apostle, has expressly restrained women from the exercise of spiritual gifts in public; but I apprehend the practice I am speaking of can no way interfere with that restriction. I suppose

them in private together, and then I judge it to be equally right and proper for either of them to pray with the other. Nor do I meet any thing in St. Paul's writings to prevent my thinking, that if he had been a married man, he would, though an apostle, have been glad of the prayers of his wife. If you ask, how often they should pray together? I think the oftener the better, provided it does not break in upon their duties; once a-day at least; and if there is a choice of hours, it might be as well at some distance from their other seasons of worship. But I would observe, as before, that in matters not expressly commanded, prudence and experience must direct.

I have written upon a supposition that you use extempore prayer; but as there are many heads of families who fear the Lord, and have not yet attained liberty to pray extempore before others, I would add, that their inability in this respect, whether real, or whether only proceeding from fear, and an undue regard to self, will not justify them in the omission of family-prayer. Helps may be procured. Mr. Jenks's Devotions are in many hands, and I doubt not but there are other excellent books of the same kind, with which I am not acquainted. If they begin with a form, not with a design to confine themselves always to one, but make it a part of their secret pleading at the throne of grace, that they may be favoured with the gift and spirit of prayer; and accustom themselves, while they use a form, to intersperse some petitions of their own; there is little doubt but they will in time find a growth in liberty and ability, and at length lay their book entirely aside. For it being every believer's duty to worship God in his family, his promise may be depended

upon, to give them a sufficiency in all things, for those services which he requires of them.

Happy is that family where the worship of God is constantly and conscientiously maintained. Such houses are *temples* in which the Lord dwells, and *castles* garrisoned by a divine power. I do not say, that by honouring God in your house, you will wholly escape a share in the trials incident to the present uncertain state of things. A measure of such trials will be necessary for the exercise and manifestation of your graces, to give you a more convincing proof of the truth and sweetness of the promises made to a time of affliction, to mortify the body of sin, and to wean you more effectually from the world. But this I will confidently say, that the Lord will both honour and comfort those who thus honour him. Seasons will occur, in which you shall know, and probably your neighbours shall be constrained to take notice, that he has not bid you seek him in vain. If you meet with troubles, they shall be accompanied by supports, and followed by deliverance; and you shall, upon many occasions, experience that he is your protector, preserving you and yours from the evils by which you will see others suffering around you.

I have rather exceeded the limits I proposed, and therefore shall only add a request, that in your addresses at the throne of grace, you will remember, &c.

LETTER V.

On the Snares and Difficulties attending the Ministry of the Gospel.

Dear Sir,

I AM glad to hear that you are ordained, and that the Lord is about to fix you in a place where there is a prospect of your being greatly useful. He has given you the desire of your heart; and I hope he has given you likewise a heart to devote yourself, without reserve, to his service, and the service of souls for his sake. I willingly comply with your request; and shall, without ceremony, offer you such thoughts as occur to me upon this occasion.

You have, doubtless, often anticipated in your mind the nature of the service to which you are now called, and made it the subject of much consideration and prayer. But a distant view of the ministry is generally very different from what it is found to be when we are actually engaged in it. The young soldier, who has never seen an enemy, may form some general notions of what is before him; but his ideas will be much more lively and diversified when he comes upon the field of battle. If the Lord was to show us the whole beforehand, who that has a due sense of his own insufficiency and weakness, would venture to engage? But he first draws us by a constraining sense of his love, and by giving us an impression of the worth of souls, and leaves us to acquire a knowledge of what is difficult and disagreeable by a gradual experience. The ministry of the Gospel, like the book which the

Apostle John ate, is a bitter sweet ; but the sweetness is tasted first, the bitterness is usually known afterwards, when we are so far engaged that there is no going back.

Yet I would not discourage you: it is a good and noble cause, and we serve a good and gracious Master ; who, though he will make us feel our weakness and vileness, will not suffer us to sink under it. His grace is sufficient for us: and if he favours us with an humble and dependent spirit, a single eye, and a simple heart, he will make every difficulty give way, and mountains shall sink into plains before his power.

You have known something of Satan's devices while you were in private life; how he has envied your privileges, assaulted your peace, and laid snares for your feet: though the Lord would not suffer him to hurt you, he has permitted him to sift and tempt, and shoot his fiery arrows at you. Without some of this discipline, you would have been very unfit for that part of your office which consists in speaking a word in season to weary and heavy-laden souls. But you may now expect to hear from him, and to be beset by his power and subtilty in a different manner. You are now to be placed in the forefront of the battle, and to stand as it were for his mark : so far as he can prevail against you now, not yourself only, but many others, will be affected : many eyes will be upon you ; and if you take a wrong step, or are ensnared into a wrong spirit, you will open the mouths of the adversaries wider, and grieve the hearts of believers more sensibly than if the same things had happened to you while you was a layman. The work of the ministry is truly honourable; but, like the post of honour in a battle, it is attended with peculiar dangers : therefore the apostle cautions

Timothy, " Take heed to thyself, and to thy doctrine." To thyself in the first place, and then to thy doctrine; the latter without the former would be impracticable and vain.

You have need to be upon your guard in whatever way your first attempts to preach the Gospel may seem to operate. If you should, (as may probably be the case, where the truth has been little known,) meet with much opposition, you will perhaps find it a heavier trial than you are aware of; but I speak of it only as it might draw forth your corruptions, and give Satan advantage against you: and this may be two ways; first, by embittering your spirit against opposers, so as to speak in anger, to set them at defiance, or retaliate upon them in their own way; which, besides bringing guilt upon your conscience, would of course increase your difficulties, and impede your usefulness. A violent opposition against ministers and professors of the Gospel is sometimes expressed by the devil's roaring, and some people think no good can be done without it. It is allowed, that men who love darkness will show their dislike of the light: but, I believe, if the wisdom and meekness of the friends of the Gospel had been always equal to their good intentions and zeal, the devil would not have had opportunity of roaring so loud as he has sometimes done. The subject-matter of the Gospel is offence enough to the carnal heart; we must therefore expect opposition: but we should not provoke or despise it, or do any thing to aggravate it. A patient continuance in well-doing, a consistency in character, and an attention to return kind offices for hard treatment, will, in a course of time, greatly soften the spirit of opposition; and instances are to be found of ministers, who are treated with some respect even by those persons in

their parishes who are most averse to their doctrine. When the apostle directs us, "If it be possible, and as "much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men," he seems to intimate, that though it be difficult, it is not wholly impracticable. We cannot change the rooted prejudices of their hearts against the Gospel; but it is possible, by the Lord's blessing, to stop their mouths, and make them ashamed of discovering it, when they behold our good conversation in Christ. And it is well worth our while to cultivate this outward peace, provided we do not purchase it at the expense of truth and faithfulness; for ordinarily we cannot hope to be useful to our people, unless we give them reason to believe that we love them, and have their interest at heart. Again, opposition will hurt you, if it should give you an idea of your own importance, and lead you to dwell with a secret self-approbation upon your own faithfulness and courage in such circumstances. If you are able to stand your ground, uninfluenced either by the favour or the fear of men, you have reason to give glory to God; but remember, that you cannot thus stand an hour, unless he upholds you. It shows a wrong turn of mind, when we are very ready to speak of our trials and difficulties of this kind, and of our address and resolution in encountering them. A natural stiffness of spirit, with a desire to have self taken notice of, may make a man willing to endure those kind of hardships, though he has but little grace in exercise: but true Christian fortitude, from a consciousness that we speak the truths of God, and are supported by his power, is a very different thing.

If you should meet with but little opposition, or if the Lord should be pleased to make your enemies your friends, you will probably be in danger from the

opposite quarter. If opposition has hurt many, popularity has wounded more. To say the truth, I am in some pain for you. Your natural abilities are considerable; you have been diligent in your studies; your zeal is warm, and your spirit is lively. With these advantages, I expect to see you a popular preacher. The more you are so, the greater will your field of usefulness be; but, alas! you cannot yet know to what it will expose you. It is like walking upon ice. When you shall see an attentive congregation hanging upon your words; when you shall hear the well-meant, but often injudicious commendations of those to whom the Lord shall make you useful; when you shall find, upon an intimation of your preaching in a strange place, people thronging from all parts to hear you, how will your heart feel? It is easy for me to advise you to be humble, and for you to acknowledge the propriety of the advice; but while human nature remains in its present state, there will be almost the same connexion between popularity and pride, as between fire and gunpowder: they cannot meet without an explosion, at least not unless the gunpowder is kept very damp. So unless the Lord is constantly moistening our hearts, (if I may so speak,) by the influences of his Spirit, popularity will soon set us in a blaze. You will hardly find a person who has been exposed to this fiery trial, without suffering loss. Those whom the Lord loves, he is able to keep, and he will keep them upon the whole; yet by such means, and in a course of such narrow escapes, that they shall have reason to look upon their deliverance as no less than miraculous. Sometimes, if his ministers are not watchful against the first impressions of pride, he permits it to gather strength; and then it is but a small thing that a few

of their admirers may think them more than men in the pulpit, if they are left to commit such mistakes when out of it, as the weakest of the flock can discover and pity. And this will certainly be the case, while pride and self-sufficiency have the ascendant. Beware, my friend, of mistaking the ready exercise of gifts for the exercise of grace. The minister may be assisted in public for the sake of his hearers; and there is something in the nature of our public work, when surrounded by a concourse of people, that is suited to draw forth the exertion of our abilities, and to engage our attention in the outward services, when the frame of the heart may be far from being right in the sight of the Lord. When Moses smote the rock, the water followed; yet he spoke unadvisedly with his lips, and greatly displeased the Lord. However, the congregation was not disappointed for his fault, nor was he put to shame before them; but he was humbled for it afterwards. They are happy whom the Lord preserves in some degree humble, without leaving them to expose themselves to the observation of men, and to receive such wounds as are seldom healed without leaving a deep scar. But even these have much to suffer. Many distressing exercises you will probably meet with upon the best supposition, to preserve in you a due sense of your own unworthiness, and to convince you, that your ability, your acceptance, and your usefulness, depend upon a power beyond your own. Sometimes, perhaps, you will feel such an amazing difference between the frame of your spirit in public and in private, when the eyes of men are not upon you, as will make you almost ready to conclude, that you are no better than an hypocrite, a mere stage-player, who derives all his pathos and exertion from the sight of the audience. At other times

you will find such a total emptiness and indisposition of mind, that former seasons of liberty in preaching will appear to you like the remembrance of a dream, and you will hardly be able to persuade yourself, you shall ever be capable of preaching again: the Scriptures will appear to you like a sealed book, and no text or subject afford any light or opening to determine your choice; And this perplexity may not only seize you in the study, but accompany you in the pulpit. If you are enabled at some times to speak to the people with power, and to resemble Sampson, when, in the greatness of his strength, he bore away the gates of the city, you will perhaps, at others, appear before them like Sampson when his locks were shorn, and he stood in fetters. So that you need not tell the people you have no sufficiency in yourself; for they will readily perceive it without your information. These things are hard to bear; yet successful popularity is not to be preserved upon easier terms: and if they are but sanctified to hide pride from you, you will have reason to number them amongst your choicest mercies.

I have but just made an entrance upon the subject of the difficulties and dangers attending the ministry. But my paper is full. If you are willing I should proceed, let me know, and I believe I can easily find enough to fill another sheet. May the Lord make you wise and watchful! That he may be the light of your eye, the strength of your arm, and the joy of your heart, is the sincere prayer of, &c.

LETTER VI.

Of the Practical Influence of Faith.

Sir,

THE use and importance of faith, as it respects a sinner's justification before God, has been largely insisted on; but it is likewise of great use and importance in the daily concerns of life. It gives evidence and subsistence to things not seen, and realizes the great truths of the Gospel, so as that they become abiding and living principles of support and direction while we are passing through this wilderness. Thus, it is as the eye and the hand, without which we cannot take one step with certainty, or attempt any service with success. It is to be wished that this practical exercise of faith were duly attended to by all professors. We should not then meet with so many cases that put us to a stand, and leave us at a great difficulty to reconcile what we see in some of whom we would willingly hope well, with what we read in Scripture of the inseparable concomitants of a true and lively faith. For how can we but be staggered, when we hear persons speaking the language of assurance, that they know their acceptance with God through Christ, and have not the least doubt of their interest in all the promises; while, at the same time, we see them under the influence of unsanctified tempers, of a proud, passionate, positive, worldly, selfish, or churlish carriage?

It is not only plain, from the general tenor of Scripture, that a covetous, a proud, or a censorious spirit, are no more consistent with the Spirit of the Gospel,

than drunkenness or whoredom; but there are many express texts directly pointed against the evils which too often are found amongst professors. Thus the Apostle James assures us, "That if any man seemeth "to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, his reli- "gion is vain;" and the Apostle John, "That if any "man love the world, the love of the Father is not in "him;" and he seems to apply this character to any man, whatever his profession or pretences may be, "who having this world's goods, and seeing his brother "have need, shutteth up his bowels of compassion from "him." Surely these texts more than intimate, that the faith which justifies the soul, does likewise receive from Jesus grace for grace, whereby the heart is purified, and the conversation regulated as becomes the Gospel of Christ.

There are too many who would have the ministry of the Gospel restrained to the privileges of believers; and when the fruits of faith, and the tempers of the mind, which should be manifest in those who have "tasted "that the Lord is gracious," are inculcated, think they sufficiently evade all that is said, by calling it *legal* preaching. I would be no advocate for legal preaching; but we must not be deterred, by the fear of a hard word, from declaring the whole counsel of God; and we have the authority and example of St. Paul, who was a champion of the doctrines of free grace, to animate us in exhorting professors to "walk worthy of "God, who has called them to his kingdom and glory." And indeed the expression of a believer's privilege is often misunderstood. It is a believer's privilege to walk with God in the exercise of faith, and, by the power of his Spirit, to mortify the whole body of sin; to gain a growing victory over the world and self, and

to make daily advances in conformity to the mind that was in Christ. And nothing that we profess to know, believe, or hope for, deserves the name of a privilege, further than we are influenced by it to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness. Whosoever is possessed of true faith, will not confine his inquiries to the single point of his acceptance with God, or be satisfied with the distant hope of heaven hereafter. He will be likewise solicitous how he may glorify God in the world, and enjoy such foretastes of heaven as are attainable while he is yet upon earth.

Faith, then, in its practical exercise, has for its object the whole word of God, and forms its estimate of all things with which the soul is at present concerned, according to the standard of Scripture. Like Moses, it "endures, as seeing him who is invisible." When our Lord was upon earth, and conversed with his disciples, their eyes and hearts were fixed upon him. In danger he was their defender; their guide when in perplexity; and to him they looked for the solution of all their doubts, and the supply of all their wants. He is now withdrawn from our eyes; but faith sets him still before us, for the same purposes, and, according to its degree, with the same effects, as if we actually saw him. His spiritual presence, apprehended by faith, is a restraint from evil, an encouragement to every service, and affords a present refuge and help in every time of trouble. To this is owing the delight a believer takes in ordinances, because there he meets his Lord; and to this likewise it is owing, that his religion is not confined to public occasions; but he is the same person in secret as he appears to be in the public assembly; for he worships him who sees in secret; and dares appeal to his all-seeing eye for the sincerity of his desires and

intentions. By faith he is enabled to use prosperity with moderation; and knows and feels, that what the world calls good is of small value, unless it is accompanied with the presence and blessings of him whom his soul loveth. And his faith upholds him under all trials, by assuring him, that every dispensation is under the direction of his Lord; that chastisements are a token of his love; that the season, measure, and continuance of his sufferings, are appointed by infinite wisdom, and designed to work for his everlasting good; and that grace and strength shall be afforded him, according to his day. Thus, his heart being fixed, trusting in the Lord, to whom he has committed all his concerns, and knowing that his best interests are safe, he is not greatly afraid of evil tidings, but enjoys a stable peace in the midst of a changing world. For, though he cannot tell what a day may bring forth, he believes that he who has invited and enabled him to cast all his cares upon him, will suffer nothing to befall him but what shall be made subservient to his chief desires, the glory of God in the sanctification and final salvation of his soul. And if, through the weakness of his flesh, he is liable to be startled by the first impression of a sharp and sudden trial, he quickly flees to his strong refuge, remembers it is the Lord's doing, resigns himself to his will, and patiently expects a happy issue.

By the same principle of faith, a believer's conduct is regulated towards his fellow-creatures; and in the discharge of the several duties and relations of life, his great aim is to please God, and to let his light shine in the world. He believes and feels his own weakness and unworthiness, and lives upon the grace and pardoning love of his Lord. This gives him an habitual tenderness and gentleness of spirit. Humbled under a

sense of much forgiveness to himself, he finds it easy to forgive others, if he has aught against any. A due sense of what he is in the sight of the Lord, preserves him from giving way to anger, positiveness, and resentment: he is not easily provoked, but is "swift to hear, "slow to speak, slow to wrath;" and if offended, easy to be entreated, and disposed, not only to yield to a reconciliation, but to seek it. As Jesus is his life, and righteousness, and strength, so he is his pattern. By faith he contemplates and studies this great exemplar of philanthrophy. With a holy ambition he treads in the footsteps of his Lord and Master, and learns of him to be meek and lowly, to requite injuries with kindness, and to overcome evil with good. From the same views, by faith he derives a benevolent spirit, and, according to his sphere and ability, he endeavours to promote the welfare of all around him. The law of love being thus written in his heart, and his soul set at liberty from the low and narrow dictates of a selfish spirit, his language will be truth, and his dealings equity. His promise may be depended on, without the interposition of oath, bond, or witness; and the feelings of his own heart, under the direction of an enlightened conscience, and the precepts of Scripture, prompt him "to do unto others "as he would desire they, in the like circumstances, "should do unto him." If he is a master, he is gentle and compassionate; if a servant, he is faithful and obedient; for in either relation he acts by faith, under the eye of his Master in heaven. If he is a trader, he neither dares nor wishes to take advantage either of the ignorance or the necessities of those with whom he deals. And the same principle of love influences his whole conversation. A sense of his own infirmities makes him candid to those of others: he will not readily be-

lieve reports to their prejudice, without sufficient proof; and even then, he will not repeat them, unless he is lawfully called to it. He believes that the precept, "Speak evil of no man," is founded upon the same authority with those which forbid committing adultery or murder; and therefore he "keeps his tongue as with a "bridle."

Lastly, Faith is of daily use as a preservative from a compliance with the corrupt customs and maxims of the world. The believer, though IN the world, is not OF it: by faith he triumphs over its smiles and enticements; he sees that all that is in the world, suited to gratify the desires of the flesh or the eye, is not only to be avoided as sinful, but as incompatible with his best pleasures. He will mix with the world so far as is necessary, in the discharge of the duties of that station of life in which the providence of God has placed him, but no further. His leisure and inclinations are engaged in a different pursuit. They who fear the Lord are his chosen companions; and the blessings he derives from the word, and throne, and ordinances of grace, make him look upon the poor pleasures and amusements of those who live without God in the world with a mixture of disdain and pity; and by faith he is proof against its frowns. He will obey God rather than man; he will "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works "of darkness, but will rather reprove them." And if, upon this account, he should be despised and injuriously treated, whatever loss he suffers in such a cause, he accounts his gain, and esteems such disgrace, his glory.

I am not aiming to draw a perfect character, but to show the proper effects of that faith which justifies, which purifies the heart, worketh by love, and overcomes the world. An habitual endeavour to possess

such a frame of spirit, and thus to adorn the Gospel of Christ, and that with growing success, is what I am persuaded you are not a stranger to; and I am afraid that they who can content themselves with aiming at any thing short of this in their profession, are too much strangers to themselves, and to the nature of that liberty wherewith Jesus has promised to make his people free. That you may go on from strength to strength, increasing in the light and image of our Lord and Saviour, is the sincere prayer of, &c.

LETTER VII.

On the Propriety of a Ministerial Address to the Unconverted.

Sir,

IN a late conversation you desired my thoughts concerning a scriptural and consistent manner of addressing the consciences of unawakened sinners in the course of your ministry. It is a point on which many eminent ministers have been, and are not a little divided; and it therefore becomes me to propose my sentiments with modesty and caution, so far as I am constrained to differ from any, from whom in general I would be glad to learn.

Some think that it is sufficient to preach the great truths of the word of God in their hearing; to set forth the utterly ruined and helpless state of fallen man by nature, and the appointed method of salvation by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and then to leave the application entirely to the agency of the Holy Spirit, who alone can enlighten the dark understandings of sinners, and enable them to receive in a due man-

ner, the doctrines either of the law or the Gospel. And they apprehend, that all exhortations, arguments, and motives, addressed to those who are supposed to be still under the influence of the carnal mind, are inconsistent with the principles of free grace, and the acknowledged inability of such persons to perform any spiritual acts; and that therefore the preachers, who, avowing the doctrines of free grace, do, notwithstanding, plead and expostulate with sinners, usually contradict themselves, and retract in their application what they had laboured to establish in the course of their sermons.

There are others, who, though they would be extremely unwilling to derogate from the free grace and sovereign power of God in the great work of conversion, or in the least degree to encourage the mistaken notion which every unconverted person has of his own power; yet think it their duty to deal with sinners as rational and moral agents: and, as such, besides declaring the counsel of God in a doctrinal way, to warn them by the terrors of the Lord, and to beseech them by his tender mercies, that they receive not the grace of God, in a preached Gospel, in vain. Nor can it be denied, but that some of them, when deeply affected with the worth of souls, and the awful importance of eternal things, have sometimes, in the warmth of their hearts, dropped unguarded expressions, and such as have been justly liable to exception.

If we were to decide to which of these different methods of preaching the preference is due, by the discernible effects of each, it will perhaps appear in fact, without making any invidious comparisons, that those ministers whom the Lord has honoured with the greatest success in awakening and converting sinners, have ge-

nerally been led to adopt the more popular way of *exhortation* and *address;* while they who have been studiously careful to avoid any direct application to sinners, as unnecessary and improper, if they have not been altogether without seals to their ministry, yet their labours have been more owned in building up those who have already received the knowledge of the truth, than in adding to their number. Now, as "he that "winneth souls is wise," and as every faithful labourer has a warm desire of being instrumental in raising the dead in sin to a life of righteousness, this seems at least a presumptive argument in favour of those, who, besides stating the doctrines of the Gospel, endeavour, by earnest persuasions and expostulations, to impress them upon the hearts of their hearers, and entreat and warn them to consider, "how they shall escape if they ne-"glect so great salvation." For it is not easy to conceive, that the Lord should most signally bear testimony in favour of that mode of preaching which is least consistent with the truth, and with itself.

But not to insist on this, nor to rest the cause on the authority or examples of men, the best of whom are imperfect and fallible, let us consult the Scriptures, which, as they furnish us with the whole subject-matter of our ministry, so they afford us perfect precepts and patterns for its due and orderly dispensation. With respect to the subject of our inquiry, the examples of our Lord Christ, and of his authorized ministers, the apostles, are both our rule and our warrant. The Lord Jesus was the great preacher of free grace, "who spake as "never man spake;" and his ministry, while it provided relief for the weary and heavy-laden, was eminently designed to stain the pride of all human glory. He knew what was in man, and declared, "that none

"could come unto him, unless drawn and taught of "God;" John vi. 44—46. And yet he often speaks to sinners in terms, which, if they were not known to be his, might perhaps be censured as inconsistent and illegal; John vi. 27.; Luke xiii. 24—27.: John xii. 35. It appears, both from the context and the tenor of these passages, that they were immediately spoken, not to his disciples, but to the multitude. The apostles copied from their Lord; they taught, that we have no sufficiency of ourselves, even to think a good thought, and that "it is not of him that willeth, or of him that "runneth, but of God who showeth mercy;" yet they plainly called upon sinners, (and that before they had given evident signs that they were pricked to the heart, as Acts iii. 31.) "to repent, and to turn from their "vanities to the living God;" Acts iii. 19. and xiv. 15. and xvii. 30. Peter's advice to Simon Magus is very full and express to this point; for though he perceived him to be "in the very gall of bitterness, and in "the bond of iniquity," he exhorted him "to repent, and "to pray, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be "forgiven." It may be presumed, that we cannot have stronger evidence, that any of our hearers are in a carnal and unconverted state, than Peter had in the case of Simon Magus; and therefore there seems no sufficient reason why we should hesitate to follow the apostle's example.

You have been told, that repentance and faith are spiritual acts, for the performance of which, a principle of spiritual life is absolutely necessary; and that therefore, to exhort an unregenerate sinner to repent or believe, must be as vain and fruitless as to call a dead person out of his grave. To this it may be answered, That we might cheerfully and confidently undertake even to

call the dead out of their graves, if we had the command and promise of God to warrant the attempt; for then we might expect his power would accompany our word. The vision of Ezekiel, chap. xxxvii. may be fitly accommodated to illustrate both the difficulties and the encouragement of a Gospel-minister. The deplorable state of many of our hearers may often remind us of the Lord's question to the prophet, "Can these dry "bones live?" Our resource, like that of the prophet, is entirely in the sovereignty, grace, and power of the Lord: "O Lord, thou knowest; impossible as it is to "us, it is easy for thee to raise them unto life; there- "fore we renounce our own reasonings; and though "we see that they are dead, we call upon them at thy "bidding, as if they were alive, and say, O ye dry "bones, hear the word of the Lord! The means is "our part, the work is thine, and to thee be all the "praise." The dry bones could not hear the prophet; but while he spoke, the Lord caused breath to enter into them, and they lived, but the word was spoken to them considered as dry and dead.

It is true, the Lord can, and I hope he often does, make that preaching effectual to the conversion of sinners, wherein little is said expressly to them, only the truths of the Gospel are declared in their hearing; but he who knows the frame of the human heart, has provided us with a variety of topics which have a moral suitableness to engage the faculties, affections, and consciences of sinners, so far at least as to leave themselves condemned if they persist in their sins, and by which he often effects the purposes of his grace; though none of the means of grace by which he ordinarily works, can produce a real change in the heart, unless they are accompanied with the efficacious power of his

Spirit. Should we admit, that an unconverted person is not a proper subject of ministerial exhortation, because he has no power in himself to comply, the just consequence of this position would perhaps extend too far, even to prove the impropriety of all exhortation universally: for when we invite the weary and heavy-laden to come to Jesus, that they may find rest; when we call upon backsliders to remember from whence they are fallen, to "repent, and to do their first works;" yea, when we exhort believers to "walk worthy of "God, who has called them to his kingdom and glory;" in each of these cases we press them to acts for which they have no inherent power of their own; and unless the Lord, the Spirit, is pleased to apply the word to their hearts, we do but speak into the air; and our endeavours can have no more effect in these instances, than if we were to say to a dead body, "Arise, and "walk." For an exertion of divine power is no less necessary to the healing of a wounded conscience, than to the breaking of a hard heart; and only he who has begun the good work of grace, is able either to revive or to maintain it.

Though sinners are destitute of spiritual life, they are not therefore mere machines. They have a power to do many things, which they may be called upon to exert. They are capable of considering their ways; they know they are mortal; and the bulk of them are persuaded in their consciences, that after death there is an appointed judgment: they are not under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins; that they do so, is not for want of power, but for want of will. The most profane swearer can refrain from his oaths, while in the presence of a person whom he fears, and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a

drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it may stand by him untasted from morning to night. And many would be deterred from sins to which they are greatly addicted, by the presence of a child, though they have no fear of God before their eyes. They have a power likewise of attending upon the means of grace; and though the Lord only can give them true faith and evangelical repentance, there seems no impropriety to invite them, upon the ground of the Gospel-promises, to seek to him who is exalted to bestow these blessings, and who is able to do that for them which they cannot do for themselves; and who has said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out." Perhaps it will not be easily proved, that entreaties, arguments, warnings, formed upon these general principles, which are in the main agreeable and adequate to the remaining light of natural conscience, are at all inconsistent with those doctrines which ascribe the whole of a sinner's salvation, from first to last, to the free sovereign grace of God.

We should undoubtedly endeavour to maintain a consistency in our preaching; but unless we keep the plan and manner of the Scripture constantly in view, and attend to every part of it, a design of consistency may fetter our sentiments, and greatly preclude our usefulness. We need not wish to be more consistent than the inspired writers, nor be afraid of speaking as they have spoken before us. We may easily perplex ourselves and our hearers, by nice reasonings on the nature of human liberty, and the divine agency on the hearts of men; but such disquisitions are better avoided. We shall, perhaps, never have full satisfaction on these subjects, till we arrive in the world of light. In the mean time, the path of duty, the good old way, lies

plain before us. If, when you are in the pulpit, the Lord favours you with a lively sense of the greatness of the trust, and the worth of the souls committed to your charge, and fills your heart with his constraining love, many little curious distinctions, which amused you at other times, will be forgotten. Your soul will go forth with your words; and while your bowels yearn over poor sinners, you will not hesitate a moment, whether you ought to warn them of their danger or not. That great champion of free grace, Dr. Owen, has a very solemn address to sinners; the running title to which is, "Ex-"hortations unto believing." It is in his exposition of the 130th Psalm, from p. 242. to 247. Lond. edit. 1609, which I recommend to your attentive consideration.

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

On the inward Witness to the Ground and Reality of Faith.

Sir,

I READILY offer you my thoughts on 1 John v. 10. "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the wit-"ness in himself;" though, perhaps, you will think I am writing a sermon, rather than a letter. If we believe in the Son of God, whatever trials we may meet with in the present life, our best concerns are safe, and our happiness is sure. If we do not, whatever else we have, or seem to have, we are in a state of condemnation; and, living and dying so, must perish. Thousands, it is to be feared, persuade themselves that they are believers, though they cannot stand the test of Scripture. And there are many real believers, who, through the prevalence of remaining unbelief, and the

temptations of Satan, form hard conclusions against themselves, though the Scripture speaks peace to them. But how does this correspond with the passage before us, which asserts universally, " He that believeth, hath " the witness in himself?" for can a man have the witness in himself, and yet not know it? It may be answered, the evidence, in its own nature, is sufficient and infallible; but we are very apt, when we would form a judgment of ourselves, to superadd rules and marks of trial, which are not given us, (for that purpose,) in the Bible. That the word and Spirit of God do witness for his children, is a point in which many are agreed, who are far from being agreed as to the nature and manner of that witness. It is, therefore, very desirable, rightly to understand the evidence by which we are to judge whether we are believers or not.

The importance and truth of the Gospel-salvation is witnessed to in heaven, by " the Father, the Word, and " the Spirit." It is witnessed to on earth, by " the " Spirit, the water, and the blood," ver. 7, 8. *The Spirit*, in ver. 8. (I apprehend,) denotes a divine light in the understanding, communicated by the Spirit of God, enabling the soul to perceive and approve the truth. *The water* seems to intend the powerful influence of this knowledge and light in the work of sanctification. And *the blood*, the application of the blood of Jesus to the conscience, relieving it from guilt and fear, and imparting a " peace which passes all understand- " ing." And he that believeth hath this united testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood, not by hearsay only, but in himself. According to the measure of his faith, (for faith has various degrees,) he has a living proof that the witness is true, by the effects wrought in his own heart.

These things, which God has joined together, are too often attempted to be separated. Attempts of this kind have been a principal source and cause of most of the dangerous errors and mistakes which are to be found amongst professors of religion. Some say much concerning *the Spirit;* and lay claim to an inward light, whereby they think they know the things of God. Others lay great stress upon *the water;* maintaining a regular conversation, abstaining from the defilements of the world, and aiming at a mastery over their natural desires and tempers; but neither the one nor the other appear to be duly sensible of the value of *the blood* of atonement, as the sole ground of their acceptance, and the spring of their life and strength. Others, again, are all for *the blood;* can speak much of Jesus, and his blood and righteousness; though it does not appear that they are truly, spiritually enlightened, to perceive the beauty and harmony of Gospel-truths, or that they pay a due regard to that "holiness without which no man "can see the Lord." But Jesus came, not by water only, or by blood only, but by *water* and *blood;* and the Spirit bears witness to both, because the Spirit is truth. The water alone affords but a cold starched form of godliness, destitute of that enlivening power which is derived from a knowledge of the preciousness of Jesus, as the Lamb that was slain. And if any talk of the blood without the water, they do but turn the grace of God into licentiousness: so, likewise, to pretend to the Spirit, and at the same time to have low thoughts of Jesus, is a delusion and vanity; for the true Spirit testifies and takes of his glory, and presents it to the soul. But the real believer receives the united testimony, and has the witness in himself that he does so.

To have the witness in ourselves, is to have the

truths that are declared in the Scripture revealed in our hearts. This brings an experimental conviction, which may be safely depended on, "that we have received "the grace of God in truth." A man born blind may believe that the sun is bright upon the testimony of another; but if he should obtain his sight, he would have the witness in himself. Believing springs from a sense and perception of the truths of the Gospel; and whoever hath this spiritual perception is a believer. He has the witness in himself. He has received the Spirit; his understanding is enlightened, whereby he sees things to be as they are described in the word of God, respecting his own state by sin, and the utter impossibility of his obtaining relief by any other means than those proposed in the Gospel. These things are hidden from us by nature. He has likewise received the blood. The knowledge of sin, and its demerits, if alone, would drive us to despair; but by the same light of the Spirit, Jesus is apprehended as a suitable and all-sufficient Saviour. All that is declared concerning his person, offices, love, sufferings, and obedience, is understood and approved. Here the wounded and weary soul finds healing and rest. Then the Apostle's language is adopted, "Yea, "doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the ex- "cellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He has likewise received the water, considered as the emblem of sanctification. To a believer, all that the Scripture teaches concerning the nature, beauty, and necessity of holiness, as a living principle in the heart, carries conviction and evidence. A deliverance from the power, as well as from the guilt of sin, appears to be an important and essential part of salvation. He sees his original and his proper happiness, that nothing less than communion with God, and conformity

to him, is worth his pursuit. And therefore he can say, "My soul thirsteth for thee; I delight in the law "of God after the inward man." In a word, his judgment and his choice are formed upon a new spiritual taste, derived from the written word, and correspondent with it, as the musical ear is adapted to relish harmony: so that what God has forbidden, appears hateful; what he has commanded, necessary; what he has promised, desirable; and what he has revealed, glorious. Whoever has these perceptions, has the witness in himself, that he has been taught of God, and believes in his Son.

If you think this explanation is agreeable to the Scripture, you will be satisfied that the witness spoken of in this passage, is very different from what some persons understand it to be. It is not an impulse, or strong persuasion, impressed upon us in a way of which we can give no account, that "we are the children of "God," and that our sins are freely forgiven; nor is the powerful application of a particular text of Scripture necessary to produce it: neither is it always connected with a very lively sensible comfort. These things in some persons and instances, may accompany the witness or testimony we are speaking of, but do not properly belong to it: and they may be, and often have been, counterfeited. But what I have described is inimitable and infallible; it is indubitably, as the magicians confessed of the miracles of Moses, the finger of God, as certainly the effect of his divine power as the creation of the world. It is true, many who have this witness, walk in darkness, and are harassed with many doubts and perplexities, concerning their state: but this is not because the witness is not sufficient to give them satisfaction, but because they do not account it

so: being misled by the influence of self-will and a legal spirit, they overlook this evidence as too simple, and expect something extraordinary; at least they think they cannot be right, unless they are led in the same way in which the Lord has been pleased to lead others with whom they may have conversed. But the Lord, the Spirit, is sovereign and free in his operations; and though he gives to all who are the subjects of his grace, the same views of sin, of themselves, and of the Saviour; yet, with respect to the circumstantials of his work, there is, as in the features of our faces, such an amazing variety, that perhaps no two persons can be found whose experiences have been exactly alike: but as the Apostle says, That "he that believeth," that is, whosoever believeth, (without exception,) "has this "witness in himself;" it must consequently arise from what is common to them all, and not from what is peculiar to a few.

Before I conclude, I would make two or three observations. In the first place, I think it is plain, that the supposition of a real believer's living in sin, or taking encouragement from the Gospel so to do, is destitute of the least foundation in truth, and can proceed only from an ignorance of the subject. Sin is the burden under which he groans; and he would account nothing short of a deliverance from it worthy the name of salvation. A principal part of his evidence that he is a believer, arises from that abhorrence of sin which he habitually feels. It is true, sin still dwelleth in him; but he loathes and resists it: upon this account he is in a state of continual warfare; if he was not so, he could not have the witness in himself, that he is born of God.

Again: From hence arises a solid evidence, that the Scripture is indeed the word of God, because it so ex-

actly describes what is exemplified in the experience of all who are subjects of a work of grace. While we are in a natural state, it is to us as a sealed book: though we can read it, and perhaps assent to the facts, we can no more understand our own concernments in what we read, than if it was written in an unknown tongue. But when the mind is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the Scripture addresses us as it were by name, explains every difficulty under which we laboured, and proposes an adequate and effectual remedy for the relief of all our wants and fears.

Lastly, It follows, that the hope of a believer is built upon a foundation that cannot be shaken, though it may and will be assaulted. It does not depend upon occasional and changeable frames, upon any that is precarious and questionable, but upon a correspondence and agreement with the written word. Nor does this agreement depend upon a train of laboured arguments and deductions, but is self-evident, as light is to the eye, to every person who has a real participation of the grace of God. It is equally suited to all capacities; by this the unlearned are enabled to know their election of God, and "to rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full "of glory." And the wisest, if destitute of this perception, though they may be masters of all the external evidences of Christianity, and able to combat the cavils of infidels, can see no real beauty in the truths of the Gospel, nor derive any solid comfort from them.

I have only sent you a few hasty hints: it would be easy to enlarge; but I sat down, not to write a book, but a letter. May this inward witness preside with power in our hearts, to animate our hopes, and to mortify our corruptions!

I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

On the Doctrines of Election and final Perseverance.

Dear Sir,

YOUR letter breathes the spirit of a Christian, though you say you are not a Calvinist. I should have still confined myself, in my letters, to the great truths in which we are agreed, if you had not invited me to touch upon the points wherein we differ. If you were positive and peremptory in your present sentiments, I should not think it my duty to debate with you; in that case, we might contend as much for victory as for truth. But as you profess yourself an inquirer, and are desirous of forming your judgment agreeable to the word of God, without being influenced by the authority of names and parties, I willingly embrace the occasion you offer me. You say, that though you are not prejudiced against the doctrines of election, and perseverance of the saints, they appear to you attended with such difficulties, that you cannot yet heartily and fully assent to them. May the Lord, the Spirit, whose office it is to guide his people into all truth, dictate to my pen, and accompany what I shall write with his blessing. It is not my intention to prove and illustrate these doctrines at large, or to encounter the various objections that have been raised against them. So much has been done in this way already, that I could only repeat what has been said to greater advantage by others. Nor need I refer you to the books which have been professedly written upon this argument. In a letter to a friend, I shall not aim at the exactness of a

disputant, but only offer a few unpremeditated hints, in the same manner as if I had the pleasure of personally conversing with you.

Permit me to remind you, in the first place, of that important aphorism, John iii. 27. (which by the by seems to speak strongly in favour of the doctrines in question:) "A man can receive nothing, except it be "given him from heaven." If you should accede to my opinions upon my persuasion only, you would be little benefited by the exchange. The Lord alone can give us the true vital, comfortable, and useful knowledge of his own truths. We may become wise in notions, and so far masters of a system, or scheme of doctrine, as to be able to argue, object, and fight, in favour of our own hypothesis, by dint of application, and natural abilities; but we rightly understand what we say, and whereof we affirm, no further than we have a spiritual perception of it wrought in our hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost. It is not therefore by noisy disputation, but by humble waiting upon God in prayer, and a careful perusal of his holy word, that we are to expect a satisfactory, experimental, and efficacious knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. I am persuaded, that you are seeking in this way; if so, I am confident you shall not seek in vain. The Lord teaches effectually, though for the most part gradually. The path of the just is compared to the light, which is very faint at the early dawn, but shineth more and more to the perfect day.

If you sincerely seek the Lord's direction by prayer, you will of course make use of his appointed means of information, and search the Scriptures. Give me leave to offer you the following advices, while you are reading and comparing spiritual things with spiritual. First, Not to lay too great stress upon a few detached texts,

but seek for that sense which is most agreeable to the general strain of the Scripture. The infallible word of God must, doubtless, be consistent with itself. If it does not appear so to us, the obscurity and seeming inconsistency must be charged to the remaining darkness and ignorance of our minds. As many locks, whose wards differ, are opened with equal ease by one master-key; so there is a certain comprehensive view of scriptural truth, which opens hard places, solves objections, and happily reconciles, illustrates, and harmonizes many texts, which, to those who have not this master key, frequently styled the *analogy of faith*, appear little less than contradictory to each other. When you obtain this key, you will be sure that you have the right sense.

Again, You will do well to consult experience as you go along. For though this is not to be depended upon in the first instance, but must itself be subjected to the rule of the written word, yet it is a good subordinate help. Consider which sense is most agreeable to what passes within you and around you, and which best answers to the dealings of God with yourself, and to what you can observe of his dealings with others.

Further, When you are led, (as I think you will be, if you are not already,) to view the Calvinist doctrines in a favourable light, be not afraid of embracing them, because there may be perhaps some objections which, for want of a full possession of the key I mentioned, you are not able to clear up; but consider if there are not as strong or stronger objections against the other side. We are poor weak creatures; and the clearing up of every difficulty is not what we are immediately called to, but rather to seek that light which may strengthen and feed our souls.

Lastly, Compare the tendency of different opinions. This is an excellent rule, if we can fairly apply it. Whatever is from God has a sure tendency to ascribe glory to him, to exclude boasting from the creature, to promote the love and practice of holiness, and increase our dependence upon his grace and faithfulness. The Calvinists have no reason to be afraid of resting the merits of their cause upon this issue; notwithstanding the unjust misrepresentations which have been often made of their principles, and the ungenerous treatment of those who would charge the miscarriages of a few individuals, as the necessary consequence of embracing those principles.

But I must check myself, or I shall finish my letter before I properly begin my subject. You have objections to the doctrine of election. You will however agree with me, that the Scripture does speak of it, and that in very strong and express terms, particularly St. Paul. I have met with some sincere people, as I believe, who have told me, they could not bear to read his 9th chapter to the Romans, but always passed it over: so that their prejudices against election, prejudiced them against a part of the Scripture likewise. But why so, unless because the dreaded doctrine is maintained too plainly to be evaded? But you will say, that some writers and preachers attempt to put an easier sense upon the apostle's words. Let us judge then, as I lately proposed, from experience. Admitting, what I am sure you will admit, the total depravity of human nature, how can we account for the conversion of a soul to God, unless we likewise admit an election of grace? The work must begin somewhere. Either the sinner first seeks the Lord, or the Lord first seeks the sinner. The former is impossible, if by na-

ture we are dead in trespasses and sins; if the God of this world has blinded our eyes, and maintains the possession of our hearts; and if our carnal minds, so far from being disposed to seek God, are enmity against him. Let me appeal to yourself. I think you know yourself too well to say, that you either sought or loved the Lord first: perhaps you are conscious, that for a season, and so far as in you lay, you even resisted his call; and must have perished, if he had not made you willing in the day of his power, and saved you in defiance of yourself. In your own case, you acknowledge that he began with you; and it must be the case universally with all that are called, if the whole race of mankind are by nature enemies to God. Then further, there must be an election, unless ALL are called. But we are assured that the broad road, which is thronged with the greatest multitudes, leads to destruction. Were not you and I in this road? Were we better than those who continue in it still? What has made us differ from our former selves? *Grace.* What has made us differ from those who are now as we once were? *Grace.* Then this grace, by the very terms, must be differencing, or distinguishing grace; that is, in other words, electing grace. And to suppose, that God should make this election or choice only at the time of our calling, is not only unscriptural, but contrary to the dictates of reason, and the ideas we have of the divine perfections, particularly those of omniscience and immutability. They who believe there is any power in man by nature, whereby he can turn to God, may contend for a conditional election upon the foresight of faith and obedience: but while others dispute, let you and me admire, for we know that the Lord foresaw us, (as we were,) in a state utterly incapable either of be-

lieving or obeying, unless he was pleased to work in us to will and to do, according to his own good pleasure.

As to final perseverance, whatever judgment we form of it in a doctrinal view, unless we ourselves *do so persevere*, our profession of religion will be utterly vain; for only "they that endure to the end shall be saved." It should seem, that whoever believes this, and is duly apprized of his own weakness, the number and strength of his spiritual enemies, and the difficulties and dangers arising from his situation in this evil world, will at least be desirous to have, (if possible,) some security, that his labour and expectation shall not be in vain. To be at an uncertainty in a point of so great importance, to have nothing to trust to for our continuance in well-doing, but our own feeble efforts, our partial diligence and short-sighted care, must surely be distressing, if we rightly consider how unable we are in ourselves to withstand the forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil, which are combined against our peace. In this view I should expect that the opposers of this doctrine, if thoroughly sensible of their state and situation, upon a supposition that they should be able to prove it unscriptural and false, would weep over their victory, and be sorry that a sentiment, so apparently suited to encourage and animate our hope, should not be founded in truth. It is not to be wondered at, that this doctrine, which gives to the Lord the glory due to his name, and provides so effectually for the comfort of his people, should be opposed and traduced by men of corrupt hearts. But it may well seem strange, that they who feel their need of it, and cannot be comfortable without it, should be afraid or unwilling to receive it. Yet many a child of light is walking in darkness upon this account. Either they are staggered by the sentiments

of those whom they think wiser than themselves, or stumbled by the falls of professors who were once advocates for this doctrine, or perplexed because they cannot rightly understand those passages of Scripture which seem to speak a different language. But as light and knowledge increase, these difficulties are lessened. The Lord claims the honour, and he engages for the accomplishment of a complete salvation, that no power shall pluck his people out of his hand, or separate them from his love. Their perseverance in grace, besides being asserted in many express promises, may be proved with the fullest evidence from the unchangeableness of God, the intercession of Christ, the union which subsists between him and his people, and from the principle of spiritual life he has implanted in their hearts, which in its own nature is connected with everlasting life, for grace is the seed of glory. I have not room to enlarge on these particulars, but refer you to the following texts, from which various strong and invincible arguments might be drawn for their confirmation; Luke xiv. 28—30. compared with Phil. i. 6; Heb. vii. 25. with Rom. viii. 34—39; John xiv. 19. with John xv. 1. 2; John iv. 14. Upon these grounds, my friend, why may not you, who have fled for refuge to the hope set before you, and committed your soul to Jesus, rejoice in his salvation; and say, "While Christ is the foun-
" dation, root, head, and husband of his people, while
" the word of God is Yea and Amen, while the coun-
" sels of God are unchangeable, while we have a Me-
" diator and High Priest before the throne, while the
" Holy Spirit is willing and able to bear witness to the
" truths of the Gospel, while God is wiser than men,
" and stronger than Satan, so long the believer in Jesus
" is and shall be safe? Heaven and earth must pass

" away, but the promise, the oath, the blood, on which " my soul relies, affords me a security which can never " fail."

As the doctrines of election and perseverance are comfortable, so they cut off all pretence of boasting and self-dependence, when they are truly received in the heart, and therefore tend to exalt the Saviour. Of course they stain the pride of all human glory, and leave us nothing to glory in but the Lord. The more we are convinced of our utter depravity and inability from first to last, the more excellent will Jesus appear. The *whole* may give the physician a good word, but the *sick* alone know how to prize him. And here I cannot but remark a difference between those who have *nothing* to trust to but free grace, and those who ascribe a *little* at least to some good disposition and ability in man. We assent to whatever they enforce from the word of God on the subject of sanctification. We acknowledge its importance, its excellency, its beauty; but we could wish they would join more with us in exalting the Redeemer's name. Their experience seems to lead them to talk of themselves, of the change that is wrought in them, and the much that depends upon their own watchfulness and striving. We likewise would be thankful if we could perceive a change wrought in us by the power of grace: we desire to be found watching likewise. But when our hopes are most alive, it is less from a view of the imperfect beginnings of grace in our hearts, than from an apprehension of him who is our all in all. His person, his love, his sufferings, his intercession, compassion, fulness, and faithfulness—these are our delightful themes, which leave us little leisure, when in our best frames, to speak of ourselves. How do our hearts soften, and our eyes melt, when we

feel some liberty in thinking and speaking of him! For we had no help in time past, nor can have any in time to come, but from him alone. If any persons have contributed a mite to their own salvation, it was more than we could do. If any were obedient and faithful to the first calls and impressions of his Spirit, it was not our case. If any were prepared to receive him beforehand, we know that we were in a state of alienation from him. We needed sovereign irresistible grace to save us, or we had been lost for ever. If there are any who have a power of their own, we must confess ourselves poorer than they are. We cannot watch, unless he watches with us; we cannot strive, unless he strives with us; we cannot stand one moment, unless he holds us up; and we believe we must perish after all, unless his faithfulness is engaged to keep us. But this we trust he will do, not for our righteousness, but for his own name's sake, and because having loved us with an everlasting love, he has been pleased in loving kindness to draw us to himself, and to be found of us when we sought him not.

Can you think, dear Sir, that a person who lives under the influence of these sentiments, will desire to continue in sin because grace abounds? No; you are too candid an observer of men and manners, to believe the calumnies which are propagated against us. It is true, there are too many false and empty professors amongst us; but are there none amongst those who hold the opposite sentiments? And I would observe, that the objection drawn from the miscarriages of reputed Calvinists is quite beside the purpose. We maintain that no doctrines or means can change the heart, or produce a gracious conversation, without the efficacious power of Almighty grace; therefore, if it is found to be so in fact,

it should not be charged against our doctrine, but rather admitted as a proof and confirmation of it. We confess, that we fall sadly short in every thing, and have reason to be ashamed and amazed that we are so faintly influenced by such animating principles; yet, upon the whole, our consciences bear us witness, and we hope we may declare it both to the church and to the world, without just fear of contradiction, that the doctrines of grace are doctrines according to godliness.

I am, &c.

LETTER X.

A; *or, Grace in the Blade.* Mark iv. 28.

Dear Sir,

ACCORDING to your desire, I sit down to give you my general views of a progressive work of grace, in the several stages of a believer's experience; which I shall mark by the different characters A, B, C, answerable to the distinctions our Lord teaches us to observe from the growth of the corn, Mark iv. 28. "First the blade, "then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The Lord leads all his people effectually and savingly to the knowledge of the same essential truths, but in such a variety of methods, that it will be needful, in this disquisition, to set aside, as much as possible, such things as may be only personal and occasional in the experience of each, and to collect those only which in a greater or less degree are common to them all. I shall not therefore give you a copy of my own experience, or of that of any individual; but shall endeavour, as clearly as I can, to state what the Scripture teaches us con-

cerning the nature and essentials of a work of grace, so far as it will bear a general application to all those who are the subjects of gracious operations.

By nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins, not only strangers to God, but in a state of enmity and opposition to his government and grace. In this respect, whatever difference there may be in the characters of men as members of society, they are all, whether wise or ignorant, whether sober or profane, equally incapable of receiving or approving divine truths, 1 Cor. ii. 14. On this ground our Lord declares, "No man can come "unto me, except the Father who has sent me draws "him." Though the term *Father* most frequently expresses a known and important distinction in the adorable Trinity, I apprehend our Lord sometimes uses it to denote God, or the Divine Nature, in contradistinction from his humanity, as in John xiv. 9. And this I take to be the sense here: "No man can come unto "me unless he is taught of God," and wrought upon by a divine power. The immediate exertion of this power, according to the economy of salvation, is rather ascribed to the Holy Spirit than to the Father, John xvi. 8—11. But it is the power of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: and therefore severally attributed to the Father, Son, and Spirit, John v. 21. and ch. vi. 44—63; 2 Cor. iii. 18; 2 Thess. iii. 5.

By A, I would understand a person who is under the drawings of God, which will infallibly lead him to the Lord Jesus Christ for life and salvation. The beginning of this work is instantaneous. It is effected by a certain kind of light communicated to the soul, to which it was before an utter stranger. The eyes of the understanding are opened and enlightened. The light at first afforded is weak and indistinct, like the morning

dawn; but when it is once begun, it will certainly increase and spread to the perfect day. We commonly speak as if conviction of sin was the first work of God upon the soul that he is in mercy about to draw unto himself. But I think this is inaccurate. Conviction is only a part, or rather an immediate effect of that first work; and there are many convictions which do not at all spring from it, and therefore are only occasional and temporary, though for a season they may be very sharp, and put a person upon doing many things. In order to a due conviction of sin, we must previously have some adequate conceptions of the God with whom we have to do. Sin may be feared as dangerous without this; but its nature and demerit can only be understood by being contrasted with the holiness, majesty, goodness, and truth, of the God against whom it is committed. No outward means, no mercies, judgments, or ordinances, can communicate such a discovery of God, or produce such a conviction of sin, without the concurrence of this divine light and power to the soul. The natural conscience and passions may be indeed so far wrought upon by outward means, as to stir up some desires and endeavours; but if these are not founded in a spiritual apprehension of the perfections of God, according to the revelation he has made of himself in his word, they will sooner or later come to nothing; and the person affected will either return by degrees to his former ways, 2 Peter ii. 20; or he will sink into a self-righteous form of godliness, destitute of the power, Luke xviii. 11. And therefore, as there are so many things in the dispensation of the Gospel suited to work upon the natural passions of men, the many woful miscarriages and apostasies amongst professors are more to be lamented than wondered at. For though the seed

may seem to spring up, and look green for a season, if there be not depth for it to take root, it will surely wither away. We may be unable to judge with certainty upon the first appearance of a religious profession, whether the work be thus deep and spiritual or not; but "the Lord knows them that are his;" and wherever it is real, it is an infallible token of salvation. Now, as God only thus reveals himself by the medium of Scripture truth, the light received this way leads the soul to the Scripture from whence it springs, and all the leading truths of the word of God soon begin to be perceived and assented to. The evil of sin is acknowledged; the evil of the heart is felt. There may be for a while some efforts to obtain the favour of God by prayer, repentance, and reformation; but, for the most part, it is not very long before these things are proved to be vain and ineffectual. The soul, like the woman mentioned, Mark v. 26. wearied with vain expedients, finds itself worse and worse, and is gradually brought to see the necessity and sufficiency of the Gospel-salvation. A. may soon be a believer thus far: That he believes the word of God, sees and feels things to be as they are there described, hates and avoids sin, because he knows it is displeasing to God, and contrary to his goodness; he receives the record which God has given of his Son; has his heart affected and drawn to Jesus by views of his glory, and of his love to poor sinners; ventures upon his name and promises as his only encouragement to come to a throne of grace; waits diligently in the use of all means appointed for the communion and growth of grace; loves the Lord's people, accounts them the excellent of the earth, and delights in their conversation. He is longing, waiting, and praying, for a share in those blessings which he believes

they enjoy, and can be satisfied with nothing less. He is convinced of the power of Jesus to save him; but through remaining ignorance and legality, the remembrance of sin committed, and the sense of present corruption, he often questions his willingness; and, not knowing the aboundings of grace, and the security of the promises, he fears lest the compassionate Saviour should spurn him from his feet.

While he is thus young in the knowledge of the Gospel, burdened with sin, and perhaps beset with Satan's temptations, the Lord, "who gathers the lambs in his "arms, and caries them in his bosom," is pleased at times to favour him with cordials, that he may not be swallowed up with over-much sorrow. Perhaps his heart is enlarged in prayer, or under hearing, or some good promise is brought home to his mind, and applied with power and sweetness. He mistakes the nature and design of these comforts, which are not given him to rest in, but to encourage him to press forward. He thinks he is then right, because he has them, and fondly hopes to have them always. Then his mountain stands strong. But ere long he feels a change: his comforts are withdrawn; he finds no heart to pray; no attention in hearing; indwelling sin revives with fresh strength, and perhaps Satan returns with redoubled rage. Then he is at his wit's end; thinks his hopes were presumptuous, and his comforts delusions. He wants to feel something that may give him a warrant to trust in the free promises of Christ. His views of the Redeemer's gracefulness are very narrow; he sees not the harmony and glory of the divine attributes in the salvation of a sinner; he sighs for mercy, but fears that justice is against him. However, by these changing dispensations, the Lord is training him up, and bringing him for-

ward. He receives grace from Jesus, whereby he is enabled to fight against sin; his conscience is tender, his troubles are chiefly spiritual troubles; and he thinks, if he could but attain a sure and abiding sense of his acceptance in the beloved, hardly any outward trial would be capale of giving him much disturbance. Indeed, notwithstanding the weakness of his faith, and the prevalence of a legal spirit, which greatly hurts him, there are some things in his present experience which he may perhaps look back upon with regret hereafter, when his hope and knowledge will be more established. Particularly that sensibility and keenness of appetite with which he now attends the ordinances, desiring the sincere milk of the word with earnestness and eagerness, as a babe does the breast. He counts the hours from one opportunity to another; and the attention and desire with which he hears may be read in his countenance. His zeal is likewise lively; and may be, for want of more experience, too importunate and forward. He has a love for souls, and a concern for the glory of God; which, though it may at some times create him trouble, and at others be mixed with some undue motions of self, yet in its principle is highly desirable and commendable; John xviii. 10.

The grace of God influences both the understanding and the affections. Warm affections, without knowledge, can rise no higher than superstition; and that knowledge which does not influence the heart and affections, will only make a hypocrite. The true believer is rewarded in both respects; yet we may observe that though A. is not without knowledge, this state is more usually remarkable for the warmth and liveliness of the affections. On the other hand, as the work advances, though the affections are not left out,

yet it seems to be carried on principally in the understanding. The old Christian has more solid, judicious, connected views of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glories of his person and redeeming love; hence his hope is more established, his dependence more simple, and his peace and strength, *cæteris paribus*, more abiding and uniform, than in the case of a young convert; but the latter has, for the most part, the advantage in point of sensible fervency. A tree is most valuable when laden with ripe fruit, but it has a peculiar beauty when in blossom. It is spring-time with A; he is in bloom, and, by the grace and blessing of the heavenly husbandman, will bear fruit in old age. His faith is weak, but his heart is warm. He will seldom venture to think himself a believer; but he sees and feels, and does those things which no one could, unless the Lord was with him. The very desire and bent of his soul is to God, and to the word of his grace. His knowledge is but small, but it is growing every day. If he is not a *father* or a *young man* in grace, he is a dear *child.* The Lord has visited his heart, delivered him from the love of sin, and fixed his desires supremely upon Jesus Christ. The spirit of bondage is gradually departing from him, and the hour of liberty, which he longs for, is approaching, when, by a further discovery of the glorious Gospel, it shall be given him to know his acceptance, and to rest upon the Lord's finished salvation. We shall then take notice of him by the name of B, in a second letter, if you are not unwilling that I should prosecute the subject.

I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

B ; *or, Grace in the Ear.* Mark iv. 28.

Dear Sir,

THE manner of the Lord's work in the hearts of his people is not easily traced, though the fact is certain, and the evidence demonstrable, from Scripture. In attempting to explain it, we can only speak in general, and are at a loss to form such a description as shall take in the immense variety of cases which occur in the experience of believers. I have already attempted such a general delineation of a young convert, under the character of A, and am now to speak of him by the name of B.

This state I suppose to commence, when the soul, after an interchange of hopes and fears, according to the different frames it passes through, is brought to rest in Jesus, by a spiritual apprehension of his complete suitableness and sufficiency, as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of all who trust in him, and is enabled by an appropriating faith to say, "He is mine, and I am his." There are various degrees of this persuasion ; it is of a growing nature, and is capable of increase so long as we remain in this world. I call it assurance, when it arises from a simple view of the grace and glory of the Saviour, independent of our sensible frames and feelings, so as to enable us to answer all objections from unbelief and Satan, with the apostle's words, "Who is he that condemneth? It "is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, "who is even at the right hand of God, who also mak-

"eth intercession for us." Rom. viii. 34. This, in my judgment, does not belong to the essence of faith, so that B should be deemed more truly a believer than A, but to the establishment of faith. And now faith is stronger, it has more to grapple with. I think the characteristic of the state of A is *desire*, and of B is *conflict*. Not that B's desires have subsided, or that A was a stranger to conflict; but as there was a sensible eagerness and keenness in A's desires, which perhaps, is seldom known to be equally strong afterwards; so there are usually trials and exercises in B's experience, something different in their kind, and sharper in their measure, than what A was exposed to, or indeed had strength to endure. A, like Israel, has been delivered from Egypt by great power and a stretched-out arm, has been pursued and terrified by many enemies, has given himself up for lost again and again. He has at last seen his enemies destroyed, and has sung the song of Moses and the Lamb upon the banks of the Red Sea. Then he commences B. Perhaps, like Israel, he thinks his difficulties are at an end, and expects to go on rejoicing till he enters the promised land. But, alas! his difficulties are in a manner but beginning; he has a wilderness before him, of which he is not aware. The Lord is now about to suit his dispensations to humble and to prove him, and to show him what is in his heart, that he may do him good, at the latter end, and that all the glory may redound to his own free grace.

Since the Lord hates and abhors sin, and teaches his people whom he loves to hate it likewise, it might seem desirable, (and all things are equally easy to him,) that at the same time they are delivered from the guilt and reigning power of sin, they should likewise be perfectly

freed from the defilement of indwelling sin, and be made fully conformable to him at once. His wisdom has, however, appointed otherwise. But from the above premises, of his hatred of sin, and his love to his people, I think we may certainly conclude, that he would not suffer sin to remain in them, if he did not purpose to over-rule it, for the fuller manifestation of the glory of his grace and wisdom, and for the making his salvation more precious to their souls. It is, however, his command, and therefore their duty; yea, further, from the new nature he has given them, it is their desire to watch and strive against sin; and to propose the mortification of the whole body of sin, and the advancement of sanctification in their hearts, as their great and constant aim, to which they are to have an habitual persevering regard. Upon this plan B sets out. The knowledge of our acceptance with God, and of our everlasting security in Christ, has in itself the same tendency upon earth as it will have in heaven, and would, in proportion to the degree of evidence and clearness, produce the same effects, of continual love, joy, peace, gratitude, and praise, if there was nothing to counteract it. But B is not all spirit. A depraved nature still cleaves to him, and he has the seeds of every natural corruption yet remaining in his heart. He lives likewise in a world that is full of snares, and occasions, suited to draw forth those corruptions; and he is surrounded by invisible spiritual enemies, the extent of whose power and subtilty he is yet to learn by painful experience. B knows, in general, the nature of his Christian warfare, and sees his right to live upon Jesus for righteousness and strength. He is not unwilling to endure hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; and believes, that though he may be sore thrust at, that

he may fall, the Lord will be his stay. He knows, that his heart is "deceitful and desperately wicked;" but he does not, he cannot know at first, the full meaning of that expression. Yet it is for the Lord's glory, and will in the end make his grace and love still more precious, that B should find new and mortifying proofs of an evil nature as he goes on, such as he could not once have believed had they been foretold to him, as in the case of Peter, Mark xiv. 29. And, in effect, the abominations of the heart do not appear in their full strength and aggravation, but in the case of one, who, like B, has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and rejoiced in his salvation. The exceeding sinfulness of sin is manifested, not so much by its breaking through the restraint of threatenings and commands, as by its being capable of acting against light and against love. Thus it was with Hezekiah. He had been a faithful and zealous servant of the Lord for many years; but I suppose he knew more of God, and of himself, in the time of his sickness, than he had ever done before. The Lord, who had signally defended him from Sennacherib, was pleased likewise to raise him from the borders of the grave by a miracle, and prolonged the time of his life in answer to prayer. It is plain, from the song which he penned upon his recovery, that he was greatly affected with the mercies he had received: yet still there was something in his heart which he knew not, and which it was for the Lord's glory he should be made sensible of; and therefore he was pleased to leave him to himself. It is the only instance in which he is said to have been left to himself, and the only instance in which his conduct is condemned. I apprehend, that in the state of B, that is, for a season after we have known the Lord, we have usually the most

sensible and distressing experience of our evil natures. I do not say, that it is necessary that we should be left to fall into gross outward sin, in order to know what is in our hearts; though I believe many have thus fallen, whose hearts, under a former sense of redeeming love, have been as truly set against sin, as the hearts of others who have been preserved from such outward falls. The Lord makes some of his children examples and warnings to others, as he pleases. They who are spared, and whose worst deviations are only known to the Lord and themselves, have great reason to be thankful. I am sure I have: the merciful Lord has not suffered me to make any considerable blot in my profession during the time I have been numbered amongst his people. But I have nothing to boast of herein. It has not been owing to my wisdom, watchfulness, or spirituality, though in the main he has not suffered me to live in the neglect of his appointed means. But I hope to go softly all my days under the remembrance of many things, for which I have as great cause to be abased before him, as if I had been left to sin grievously in the sight of men. Yet with respect to my acceptance in the Beloved, I know not if I have had a doubt of a quarter of an hour's continuance, for many years past. But, Oh! the multiplied instances of stupidity, ingratitude, impatience, and rebellion, to which my conscience has been witness! And as every heart knows its own bitterness, I have generally heard the like complaints from others of the Lord's people with whom I have conversed, even from those who have appeared to be eminently gracious and spiritual. B does not meet with these things perhaps at first, nor every day. The Lord appoints occasions and turns in life, which try our spirits. There are particular seasons

when temptations are suited to our frames, tempers, and situations; and there are times when he is pleased to withdraw, and to permit Satan's approach, that we may feel how vile we are in ourselves. We are prone to spiritual pride, to self dependence, to vain confidence, to creature attachments, and a train of evils. The Lord often discovers to us one sinful disposition by exposing us to another. He sometimes shows us what he can do for us and in us; and at other times how little we can do, and how unable we are to stand without him. By a variety of these exercises, through the over-ruling and edifying influences of the Holy Spirit. B is trained up in a growing knowledge of himself and of the Lord. He learns to be more distrustful of his own heart, and to suspect a snare in every step he takes. The dark and disconsolate hours which he has brought upon himself in times past, make him doubly prize the light of God's countenance, and teach him to dread whatever might grieve the Spirit of God, and cause him to withdraw again. The repeated and multiplied pardons which he has received, increase his admiration of, and the sense of his obligations to, the rich sovereign abounding mercy of the covenant. Much has been forgiven him, therefore he loves much, and therefore he knows how to forgive and pity others. He does not call evil good, or good evil; but his own experiences teach him tenderness and forbearance. He experiences a spirit of meekness towards those who are overtaken in a fault, and his attempts to restore such, are according to the pattern of the Lord's dealings with himself. In a word, B's character, in my judgment, is complete, and he becomes a C, when the habitual frame of his heart, answers to that passage in the prophet Ezekiel, chap. xvi. 63. "That thou mayest re-

" member, and be confounded, and never open thy
" mouth any more, (to boast, complain, or censure,) be-
" cause of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee
" for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God."

I am, &c.

LETTER XII.

C; *or, The full Corn in the Ear.* Mark iv. 28.

Dear Sir,

BY way of distinction, I assigned to A the characteristic of *desire*, to B that of *conflict*. I can think of no single word more descriptive of the state of C than *contemplation*. His eminence, in comparison of A, does not consist in the *sensible* warmth and fervency of his affections: in this respect many of the most exemplary believers have looked back with a kind of regret upon the time of their espousals, when, though their judgments were but imperfectly formed, and their views of Gospel-truths were very indistinct, they felt a fervour of spirit, the remembrance of which is both humbling and refreshing; and yet they cannot recall the same sensations. Nor is he properly distinguished from B by a consciousness of his acceptance in the Beloved, and an ability of calling God his father; for this I have supposed B has attained to. Though, as there is a growth in every grace, C having had his views of the Gospel, and of the Lord's faithfulness and mercy, confirmed by a longer experience, his assurance is of course more *stable* and more *simple*, than when he first saw himself safe from all condemnation. Neither has C, properly speaking, any more strength or stock of grace

inherent in himself than B, or even than A. He is in the same state of absolute dependence, as incapable of performing spiritual acts, or of resisting temptations by his own power, as he was at the first day of his setting out. Yet in a sense he is much stronger, because he has a more feeling and constant sense of his own weakness. The Lord has been long teaching him this lesson by a train of various dispensations; and through grace he can say, He has not suffered so many things in vain. His heart has deceived him so often, that he is now in a good measure weaned from trusting to it; and therefore he does not meet with so many disappointments. And having found again and again the vanity of all other helps, he is now taught to go to the Lord *at once* for "grace to help in every time of need." Thus he is strong, not in himself, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

But C's happiness and superiority to B, lies chiefly in this, that by the Lord's blessing on the use of means, such as prayer, reading and hearing of the word, and by a sanctified improvement of what he has seen of the Lord, and of his own heart, in the course of his experience, he has attained clearer, deeper, and more comprehensive views of the mystery of redeeming love; of the glorious excellency of the Lord Jesus, in his person, offices, grace, and faithfulness; of the harmony and glory of all the divine perfections manifested in and by him to the church; of the stability, beauty, fulness, and certainty of the Holy Scriptures, and of the heights, depths, lengths, and breadths of the love of God in Christ. Thus though his sensible feelings may not be so warm as when he was in the state of A, his judgment is more solid, his mind more fixed, his thoughts more habitually exercised upon the things within the

vail. His great business is to behold the glory of God in Christ; and by beholding, he is changed into the same image, and brings forth in an eminent and uniform manner the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. His contemplations are not barren speculations, but have a real influence, and enable him to exemplify the Christian character to more advantage, and with more consistence, than can in the present state of things be expected either from A or B. The following particulars may illustrate my meaning.

I. Humility. A measure of this grace is to be expected in every true Christian: but it can only appear in proportion to the knowledge they have of Christ and of their own hearts. It is a part of C's daily employment to look back upon the way by which the Lord has led him; and while he reviews the *Ebenezers* he has set up all along the road, he sees, in almost an equal number, the monuments of his own perverse returns, and how he has in a thousand instances rendered to the Lord evil for good. Comparing these things together, he can without affectation adopt the apostle's language, and style himself "less than the least of all saints, and of sinners "the chief." A and B know that they ought to be humbled; but C is truly so, and feels the force of that text which I mentioned in my last; Ezek. xvi. 63. Again, as he knows most of himself, so he has seen most of the Lord. The apprehension of infinite Majesty combined with infinite love, makes him shrink into the dust. From the exercise of this grace he derives two others, which are exceedingly ornamental, and principal branches of the mind which was in Christ.

The one is, submission to the will of God. The views he has of his own vileness, unworthiness, and

ignorance, and of the divine sovereignty, wisdom, and love, teach him to be content in every state, and to bear his appointed lot of suffering with resignation, according to the language of David in a time of affliction, "I "was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou "didst it."

The other is, tenderness of spirit towards his fellow Christians. He cannot but judge of their conduct according to the rule of the word. But his own heart, and the knowledge he has acquired of the snares of the world, and the subtilty of Satan, teach him to make all due allowances, and qualify him for admonishing and restoring, in the spirit of meekness, those who have been overtaken in a fault. Here A is usually blameable; the warmth of his zeal, not being duly corrected by a sense of his own imperfections, betrays him often into a censorious spirit. But C can bear with A likewise, because he hath been so himself, and he will not expect green fruit to be ripe.

II. Spirituality. A spiritual taste, and a disposition to account all things mean and vain, in comparison of the knowledge and love of God in Christ, are essential to a true Christian. The world can never be his prevailing choice; 1 John ii. 15. Yet we are renewed but in part, and are prone to an undue attachment to worldly things. Our spirits cleave to the dust, in defiance to the dictates of our better judgments; and I believe the Lord seldom gives his people a considerable victory over this evil principle, until he has let them feel how deeply it is rooted in their hearts. We may often see persons entangled and clogged in this respect, of whose sincerity in the main we cannot justly doubt; especially upon some sudden and unexpected turn in life, which brings them into a situation

they have not been accustomed to. A considerable part of our trials are mercifully appointed to wean us from this propensity; and it is gradually weakened by the Lord's showing us at one time the vanity of the creature, and at another his own excellence and all-sufficiency. Even C is not perfect in this respect; but he is more sensible of the evil of such attachments, more humbled for them, more watchful against them, and more delivered from them. He still feels a fetter, but he longs to be free. His allowed desires are brought to a point; and he sees nothing worth a serious thought, but communion with God and progress in holiness. Whatever outward changes C may meet with, he will in general be the same man still. He has learned with the apostle, not only to suffer want, but, (which is perhaps the harder lesson,) how to abound. A palace would be a prison to him, without the Lord's presence, and with this a prison would be a palace. From hence arises a peaceful reliance upon the Lord; he has nothing which he cannot commit into his hands, which he is not habitually aiming to resign to his disposal. Therefore he is not afraid of evil tidings; but when the hearts of others shake like the leaves of a tree, he is fixed, trusting in the Lord, who he believes *can* and *will* make good every loss, sweeten every bitter, and appoint all things to work together for his advantage. He sees that the time is short, lives upon the foretastes of glory, and therefore accounts not his life, or any inferior concernment dear, so that he may finish his course with joy.

III. A union of heart to the glory and will of God, is another noble distinction of C's spirit. The glory of God and the good of his people are inseparably connected. But of these great ends the first is unspeaka-

bly the highest and the most important, and into which every thing else will be finally resolved. Now, in proportion as we advance nearer to him, *our* judgment, aim, and end, will be conformable to *his*, and his glory will have the highest place in our hearts. At first it is not so, or but very imperfectly. Our concern is chiefly about ourselves; nor can it be otherwise. The convinced soul inquires, What shall I do to be saved? The young convert is intent upon sensible comforts; and in the seasons when he sees his interest secure, the prospect of the troubles he may meet with in life makes him often wish for an early dismission, that he may be at rest, and avoid the heat and burden of the day. But C has attained to more enlarged views; he has a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which would be importunate if he considered only himself; but his chief desire is, that God may be glorified in him, whether by his life or by his death. He is not his own; nor does he desire to be his own; but so that the power of Jesus may be manifested in him, he will take pleasure in infirmities, in distresses, in temptations: and though he longs for heaven, would be content to live as long as Methuselah upon earth, if, by any thing he could do or suffer, the will and glory of God might be promoted. And though he loves and adores the Lord for what he has done and suffered for him, delivered him from, and appointed him to; yet he loves and adores him likewise with a more simple and direct love, in which self is in a manner forgot, from the consideration of his glorious excellence and perfections, as he is in himself. That God in Christ is glorious over all, and blessed for ever, is the very joy of his soul; and his heart can frame no higher wish, than that the sovereign, wise, holy will of God may be accomplished in him, and all his creatures.

Upon this grand principle his prayers, schemes, and actions, are formed. Thus C is already made like the angels; and, so far as is consistent with the inseparable remnants of a fallen nature, the will of God is regarded by him upon earth, as it is by the inhabitants of heaven.

The power of divine grace in C may be exemplified in a great variety of situations. C may be rich or poor, learned or illiterate, of a lively natural spirit, or of a more slow and phlegmatical constitution. He may have a comparatively smooth, or a remarkably thorny path in life; he may be a minister or layman; these circumstantials will give some tincture and difference in appearance to the work; but the work itself is the same; and we must, as far as possible, drop the consideration of them all, or make proper allowances for each, in order to form a right judgment of the life of faith. The outward expression of grace may be heightened and set off to advantage by many things which are merely natural, such as evenness of temper, good sense, a knowledge of the world, and the like; and it may be darkened by things which are not properly sinful, but unavoidable, such as lowness of spirit, weak abilities, and pressure of temptations, which may have effects that they who have not had experience in the same things cannot properly account for. A double quantity of real grace, if I may so speak, that has a double quantity of hindrances to conflict with, will not be easily observed, unless these hindrances are likewise known and attended to; and a smaller measure of grace may appear great when its exercise meets with no remarkable obstruction. For these reasons, we can never be competent judges of each other, because we cannot be competently acquainted with the whole complex case.

But our great and merciful High-priest knows the whole; he considers our frame, "remembers that we "are but dust;" makes gracious allowances, pities, bears, accepts, and approves, with unerring judgment. The sun, in his daily course, beholds nothing so excellent and honourable upon earth as C, though perhaps he may be confined to a cottage, and is little known or noticed by men. But he is the object and residence of divine love, the charge of angels, and ripening for everlasting glory. Happy C! his toils, sufferings, and exercises, will be soon at an end; soon his desires will be accomplished; and he who has loved him, and redeemed him with his own blood, will receive him to himself, with a "Well done, good and faithful servant; "enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

If this representation is agreeable to the Scriptures, how greatly are they mistaken, and how much to be pitied, who, while they make profession of the Gospel, seem to have no idea of the effects it is designed to produce upon the hearts of believers, but either allow themselves in a worldly spirit and conversation, or indulge their unsanctified tempers, by a fierce contention for names, notions, and parties. May the Lord give to you and to me daily to grow in the experience of that wisdom which "is first pure, then peaceable, gen- "tle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good "works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

On hearing Sermons.

Dear Sir,

I AM glad to find that the Lord has at length been pleased to fix you in a favoured situation, where you have frequent opportunities of hearing the Gospel. This is a great privilege; but, like all other outward privileges, it requires grace and wisdom to make a due improvement of it; and the great plenty of ordinances you enjoy, though in itself a blessing, is attended with snares, which, unless they are carefully guarded against, may hinder rather than promote your edification. I gladly embrace the occasion you afford me, of offering you my advice upon this subject. A remembrance of the mistakes I have myself formerly committed, and the observations I have made upon the conduct of professors, considered as hearers, will perhaps in some measure qualify me for the task you have assigned me.

The faithful ministers of the Gospel, are *all* the servants and ambassadors of Christ; they are called and furnished by his Holy Spirit; they speak in his name; and their success in the discharge of their office, be it more or less, depends entirely upon his blessing: so far they are all upon a par. But in the measure of their ministerial abilities, and in the peculiar turn of their preaching, there is a great variety. There are "diver-"sities of gifts from the same Spirit; and he distributes "to every man severally according to his own will." Some are more happy in alarming the *careless*, others in administering consolation to the *wounded* conscience.

Some are set more especially for the establishment and confirmation of the Gospel doctrines; others are skilful in solving casuistical points; others are more excellent in enforcing practical godliness; and others again, having been led through depths of temptation and spiritual distress, are best acquainted with the various workings of the heart, and know best how to speak a word in season to weary and exercised souls. Perhaps no true minister of the Gospel, (for all such are taught of God,) is wholly at a loss upon either of these points; but few, if any, are remarkably and equally excellent in managing them all. Again, as to their manner, some are more popular and pathetic, but at the same time more general and diffuse; while the want of that life and earnestness in delivery is compensated in others by the closeness, accuracy, and depth of their compositions. In this variety of gifts, the Lord has a gracious regard to the different tastes and dispositions, as well as to the wants of his people: and by their combined effects the complete system of his truth is illustrated, and the good of his church promoted with the highest advantage; while his ministers, like officers assigned to different stations in an army, have not only the good of the whole in view, but each one his particular post to maintain. This would be more evidently the case, if the remaining depravity of our hearts did not afford Satan but too much advantage in his subtile attempts to hurt and ensnare us. But, alas! how often has he prevailed to infuse a spirit of envy or dislike in ministers towards each other, to withdraw hearers from their proper concernment, by dividing them into parties, and stirring them up to contend for a Paul, an Apollos, or a Cephas, for their own favourites, to the disparagement of others, who are equally dear to the Lord, and faithful in his

service? You may think my preamble long; but I shall deduce my advices chiefly from it; taking it for granted, that to you I have no need of proving at large what I have advanced.

As the gifts and talents of ministers are different, I advise you to choose for your stated pastor and teacher, one whom you find most suitable, upon the whole, to your own taste, and whom you are likely to hear with the most pleasure and advantage. Use some deliberation and much prayer in this matter. Entreat the Lord, who knows better than you do yourself, to guide you where your soul may be best fed; and when your choice is fixed, you will do well to make a point of attending his ministry constantly, I mean at least at the stated times of worship on the Lord's day. I do not say that no circumstance will justify your going elsewhere at such times occasionally; but, I think, the seldomer you are absent, the better. A stated and regular attendance encourages the minister, affords a good example to the congregation; and a hearer is more likely to meet with what is directly suited to his own case, from a minister who knows him, and expects to see him, than he can be from one who is a stranger. Especially I would not wish you to be absent for the sake of gratifying your curiosity, to hear some new preacher, who you have perhaps been told is a very extraordinary man. For in *your way* such occasions might possibly offer almost every week. What I have observed of many who run about unseasonably after new preachers, has reminded me of Prov. xxvii. 8. "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is the "man that wandereth from his place." Such unsettled hearers seldom thrive: they usually grow wise in their own conceits, have their heads filled with notions.

acquire a dry, critical, and censorious spirit; and are more intent upon disputing who is the best preacher, than upon obtaining benefit to themselves from what they hear. If you could find a man indeed, who had a power *in himself* of dispensing a blessing to your soul, you might follow him from place to place; but as the blessing is in the Lord's hands, you will be more likely to receive it by waiting where his providence has placed you, and where he has met with you before.

But as human nature is prone to extremes, permit me to give you a caution on the other hand. If the minister, under whom you statedly attend, is made very acceptable to you, you will be in the less danger of slighting *him*. But be careful that you do not slight any other minister of Christ. If, therefore, when you come to hear your own preacher, you find another in the pulpit, do not let your looks tell him, that if you had known he had been there, you would not have come. I wish indeed you may never think so in your heart; but though we cannot prevent evil thoughts from rising in our minds, we should endeavour to combat and suppress them. Some persons are so curious, or rather so weak, that if their favourite minister is occasionally absent, they hardly think it worth their while to hear another. A judicious and faithful minister, in this case, instead of being delighted with such a mark of peculiar attachment to himself, will be grieved to think that they have profited no more by his labours; for it is his desire to win souls, not to himself, but to Jesus Christ. I hope you, my friend, will always attend the ordinances with a view to the Lord's presence; and when you are in your proper place, consider the preacher, (if he preaches the truth,) as one providentially and expressly sent by the Lord to you at that time:

and that you could not choose better for yourself, all things considered, than he has chosen for you. Do not limit the Almighty, by confining your expectations to a single instrument. If you do, you will probably procure your own disappointment. If you fix your hopes upon the *man*, the Lord may withhold his blessing, and then the best men and the best sermons will prove to you but as clouds without water. But, besides the more stated seasons of worship on the Lord's day, you have many opportunities of hearing sermons occasionally in the course of the week; and thus you may partake of that variety of gifts which I have already spoken of. This will be either a benefit, or otherwise, according to the use you make of it. I would recommend to you to improve these occasions, but under some restrictions.

In the first place, be cautious that you do not degenerate into the spirit of a *mere hearer*, so as to place the chief stress of your profession upon running hither and thither after preachers. There are many who are always upon the wing; and, without a due regard to what is incumbent upon them in the shop, in the family, or in the closet, they seem to think they were sent into the world only to hear sermons, and to hear as many in a day as they possibly can. Such persons may be fitly compared to Pharaoh's lean kine; they devour a great deal; but for want of a proper digestion, they do not flourish: their souls are lean; they have little solid comfort; and their profession abounds more in leaves than in fruit. If the twelve apostles were again upon earth, and you could hear them all every week; yet, if you were not attentive to the duties of the closet; if you did not allow yourself time for reading, meditation, and prayer; and if you did not likewise

conscientiously attend to the concernments of your particular calling, and the discharge of your duties in relative life; I should be more ready to blame your indiscretion, than to admire your zeal. Every thing is beautiful in its season; and if one duty frequently jostles out another, it is a sign either of a weak judgment, or of a wrong turn of mind. No public ordinances can make amends for the neglect of secret prayer; nor will the most diligent attendance upon them justify us in the neglect of those duties, which, by the command and appointment of God, we owe to society.

Again, as it is our trial to live in a day wherein so many contentions and winds of strange doctrines abound, I hope you will watch and pray that you may not have *itching ears*, inclining you to hearken after novel and singular opinions, and the erroneous sentiments of men of unstable minds, who are not sound in the faith. I have known persons who, from a blameable curiosity, have gone to hear such, not for the sake of edification, which they could not expect, but to know what they had to say, supposing that they themselves were too well established in the truth to be hurt by them. But the experiment, (without a just and lawful call,) is presumptuous and dangerous. In this way many have been hurt, yea, many have been overthrown. Error is like poison; the subtilty, quickness, and force of its operation, is often amazing. As we pray not to be led into temptation, we should take care not to run into it wilfully. If the Lord has shown you what is right, it is not worth your while to know, (if you could know it,) how many ways there are of being wrong.

Further, I advise you, when you hear a Gospel-sermon, and it is not in all respects to your satisfaction,

be not too hasty to lay the whole blame upon the preacher. The Lord's ministers have not much to say in their own behalf. They feel, (it is to be hoped,) their own weakness and defects, and the greatness and difficulty of their work. They are conscious that their warmest endeavours to proclaim the Saviour's glory are too cold; and their most importunate addresses to the consciences of men are too faint; and sometimes they are burdened with such discouragements, that even their enemies would pity them if they knew their case. Indeed, they have much to be ashamed of; but it will be more useful for you, who are a hearer, to consider whether the fault may not possibly be in yourself. Perhaps you thought too highly of the man, and expected too much from him; or perhaps you thought too meanly of him, and expected too little. In the former case, the Lord justly disappointed you; in the latter, you received according to your faith. Perhaps you neglected to pray for him; and then, though he might be useful to others, it is not at all strange that he was not so to you. Or possibly you have indulged a trifling spirit, and brought a dearth and deadness upon your own soul; for which you had not been duly humbled, and the Lord chose that time to rebuke you.

Lastly, as a hearer, you have a right to try all doctrines by the word of God; and it is your duty so to do. Faithful ministers will remind you of this; they will not wish to hold you in an implicit and blind obedience to what they say upon their own authority, nor desire that you should follow them further than they have the Scripture for their warrant. They would not be lords over your conscience, but helpers of your joy. Prize this Gospel-liberty, which sets you free from the doctrines and commandments of men; but do not abuse

it to the purposes of pride and self. There are hearers who make *themselves*, and not the Scripture, the standard of their judgment. They attend not so much to be instructed, as to pass their sentence. To them, the pulpit is the *bar* at which the minister stands to take his trial before them; a bar at which few escape censure, from judges at once so severe and inconsistent. For, as these censors are not all of a mind, and perhaps agree in nothing so much as in the opinion they have of their own wisdom, it has often happened, that, in the course of one and the same sermon, the minister has been condemned as a Legalist and an Antinomian, as too high in his notions, and too low, as having too little action, and too much. O! this is a hateful spirit, that prompts hearers to pronounce *ex cathedrâ* as if they were infallible, breaks in upon the rights of private judgment, even in matters not essential, and makes a man an offender for a word. This spirit is one frequent unhappy evil, which springs from the corruption of the heart, when the Lord affords the means of grace in great abundance. How highly would some of the Lord's hidden ones, who are destitute of the ordinances, prize the blessing of a preached Gospel, with which too many professors seem to be surfeited. I pray God to preserve you from such a spirit, (which I fear is spreading, and infects us like the pestilence,) and to guide you in all things.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

On Temptation.

Dear Sir,

WHAT can you expect from me on the subject of Temptation, with which you have been so much more conversant than myself? On this point I am more disposed to receive information from you, than to offer my advice. You, by the Lord's appointment, have had much business and exercise on these great waters; whereas the knowledge I have of what passes there, I have gained more from observation than from actual experience. I shall not wonder if you think I write like a novice: however, your request has the force of a command with me. I shall give you my thoughts; or rather, shall take occasion to write, not so much to you as to others, who, though they may be plunged in the depths of temptation, have not yet seen so much of the wisdom and power of God in these dispensations as yourself. I shall first inquire, Why the Lord permits some of his people to suffer such violent assaults from the powers of darkness; and then suggest a few advices to tempted souls.

The temptations of Satan, (which, though not the most painful, are in reality the most dangerous,) do not directly belong to my present design. I mean those, by which he is too successful in drawing many professors from the path of duty, in filling them with spiritual pride, or lulling them into carnal security. In these attempts he is often most powerful and prevalent when he is least perceived; he seldom distresses those whom

he can deceive. It is chiefly when these endeavours fail, that he fights against the peace of the soul. He hates the Lord's people, grudges them all their privileges and all their comforts; and will do what he can to disquiet them, because he cannot prevail against them. And though the Lord sets such bounds to his rage as he cannot pass, and limits him both as to manner and time, he is often pleased to suffer him to discover his malice to a considerable degree; not to gratify Satan, but to humble and prove *them;* to show them what is in their hearts, to make them truly sensible of their immediate and absolute dependence upon himself, and to quicken them to watchfulness and prayer. Though temptations, in their own nature, are grievous and dreadful, yet when, by the grace of God, they are productive of these effects, they deserve to be numbered among the "all things which are appointed to "work together for the good of those who love him." The light carriage, vain confidence, and woful backslidings of many professors, might, perhaps, (speaking after the manner of men,) have been in some measure prevented, had they been more acquainted with this spiritual warfare, and had they drunk of the cup of temptation, which but few of those who walk humbly and uprightly are exempted from tasting of, though not all in the same degree. One gracious end, therefore, that the Lord has in permitting his people to be tempted, is for the prevention of greater evils, that they may not grow proud or careless, or be ensnared by the corrupt customs of the world. In this view, I doubt not, however burdensome your trials may at some seasons prove, you are enabled, by your composed judgment, to rejoice in them, and be thankful for them. You know what you suffer now; but you know not what might

have been the consequence, if you had never smarted by the fiery darts of the wicked one. You might have been taken in a more fatal snare, and been numbered with those who, by their grievous declensions and falls, have caused the ways of truth to be evil spoken of.

Another design is, for the manifestation of his power, and wisdom, and grace, in supporting the soul under such pressures as are evidently beyond its own strength to sustain. A bush on fire, and not consumed, engaged the attention of Moses. This emblem is generally applicable to the state of a Christian in the present life, but never more so than when he is in the fire of temptation. And though his heaviest sufferings of this kind are usually hidden from the notice of his fellow-creatures, yet there are other eyes always upon him. "We are," says the Apostle, "a spectacle to the world;" not only to men, but to angels also. Many things probably pass in the invisible state, in which we have a nearer concernment than we are ordinarily aware of. The beginning of the book of Job throws some light upon this point, and informs us, (of which we should have been otherwise totally ignorant,) of the true cause of his uncommon sufferings. Satan had challenged him, charged him as a hypocrite, and thought he was able to prove him one, if he could have permission to attack him. The Lord, for the vindication of Job's integrity, and for the manifestation of his own faithfulness and power in favour of his servant, was pleased to give Satan leave to try what he could do. The experiment answered many good purposes: Job was humbled, yet approved; his friends were instructed; Satan was confuted, and disappointed; and the wisdom and mercy of the Lord, in his darkest dispensations towards his people, were gloriously illustrated. This contest and the event were recorded for the direction

and encouragement of his church to the end of time. Satan's malice is not abated; and though he has met with millions of disappointments, he still, like Goliah of old, defies the armies of God's Israel; he challenges the stoutest, and "desires to have them that he may sift "them as wheat." Indeed, he is far an overmatch for them, considered as in themselves: but though they are weak, their Redeemer is mighty, and they are for ever secured by his love and intercession. "The Lord "knows them that are his, and no weapon formed "against them can prosper." That this may appear with the fullest evidence, Satan is allowed to assault them. We handle vessels of glass or china with caution, and endeavour to preserve them from falls and blows, because we know they are easily broken. But if a man had the art of making glass malleable, and like iron, capable of bearing the stroke of a hammer without breaking, it is probable, that instead of locking it carefully up he would rather, for the commendation of his skill, permit many to attempt to break it, when he knew their attempts would be in vain. Believers are compared to earthen vessels, liable in themselves to be destroyed by a small blow; but they are so strengthened and tempered by the power and supply of divine grace, that the fiercest efforts of their fiercest enemies against them may be compared to the dashing of waves against a rock. And that this may be known and noticed, they are exposed to many trials; but the united and repeated assaults of the men of the world, and the powers of darkness, afford but the more incontestible demonstration, that the Lord is with them of a truth, and that his strength is made perfect in their weakness. Surely this thought, my friend, will afford you consola-

tion; and you will be content to suffer, if God may be glorified by you and in you.

Further, By enduring temptation, you, as a living member of the body of Christ, have the honour of being conformed to your head. He suffered, being tempted; and because he loves you, he calls you to a participation of his sufferings, and to taste of his cup; not the cup of the wrath of God; this he drank alone, and he drank it all. But in affliction he allows his people to have fellowship with him; thus they fill up the measure of his sufferings, and can say, As he was, so are we in the world. Marvel not that the world hates you, neither marvel that Satan rages against you. Should not the disciple be as his Lord? Can the servant expect or desire peace from the avowed enemies of his master? We are to follow his steps; and can we wish, if it were possible, to walk in a path strewed with flowers, when his was strewed with thorns? Let us be in nothing terrified by the power of our adversaries; which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to us of salvation, and that of God. To us it is given, not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for his sake. If we would make peace with the world, the world would let us alone; if we could be content to walk in the ways of sin, Satan would give us no disturbance; but because grace has rescued us from his dominion, and the love of Jesus constrains us to live to him alone, therefore the enemy, like a lion robbed of his prey, roars against us. He roars, but he cannot devour; he plots and rages, but he cannot prevail; he disquiets, but he cannot destroy. If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him: in due time he will bruise Satan under our feet, make us more than con-

querors, and place us where we shall hear the voice of war no more for ever.

Again, As by temptations, we are conformed to the *life* of Christ, so likewise, by the sanctifying power of grace, they are made subservient to advance our conformity to his *image;* particularly as we thereby acquire a sympathy and fellow-feeling with our suffering brethren. This is eminently a branch of the mind that was in Christ. He knows how to pity and help those who are tempted, because he has been tempted himself. He knows what temptations mean, not only with that knowledge whereby he knows all things, but by experience. He well remembers what he endured in the wilderness, and in the garden; and though it is for *his* glory and *our* comfort that he suffered temptation without sin, yet for that very reason, and because he was perfectly holy, the temptations of Satan were unspeakably more bitter to him than they can be to us. The great duty and refuge of the tempted now is, to apply to him; and they have the highest encouragement to do so, in that they are assured he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. And for the like reason they find some consolation in applying to those of their brethren who have suffered the same things. None but these can either understand or pity their complaints. If the Lord has any children who are not exercised with spiritual temptations, I am sure they are but poorly qualified to "speak a word in season to them "that are weary." In this school you have acquired the tongue of the learned; and let it not seem a small thing to you, if the Lord has given you wisdom and ability, to comfort the afflicted ones: if your prayers, your conversation, and the knowledge they have of your trials, afford them some relief in a dark hour, this is an

honour and a privilege which, I am persuaded, you will think you have not purchased too dear, by all that you have endured.

Once more: Temptations, by giving us a painful sensibility of the weakness of our graces and the strength of our inward corruptions, tend to mortify the evil principles of self-dependence and self-righteousness, which are so deeply rooted in our fallen nature; to make Christ, in all his relations, offices, and characters, more precious to us; and to convince us, that without him we can do nothing. It would be easy to enlarge upon these and other advantages which the Lord enables his people to derive from the things which they suffer; so that they may say, with Samson, "Out of the eater "comes forth meat;" and that what their adversary designs for their overthrow, contributes to their establishment. But I have already exceeded my limits. Enough, I hope, has been said to prove, that He has wise and gracious ends in permitting them for a season to be tossed with tempest, and not comforted. Ere long these designs will be more fully unfolded to us; and we shall be satisfied that he has done all things well. In the mean while it is our duty, and will be much for our comfort, to believe it upon the authority of his word.

I should now proceed to offer some advices to those who are tempted; but I am ready to say, To what purpose? When the enemy comes in like a flood; when the very foundations of hope are attacked; when suspicions are raised in the mind, not only concerning an interest in the promises, but concerning the truth of the Scripture itself; when a dark cloud blots out, not only the sense, but almost the remembrance of past comforts: when the mind is overwhelmed with torrents of blasphemous, unclean, or monstrous imaginations.

things horrible and unutterable; when the fiery darts of Satan have set the corruptions of the heart in a flame; at such a season a person is little disposed or able to listen to advice. I shall, however, mention some things by which, ordinarily, Satan maintains his advantage against them in these circumstances, that they may be upon their guard as much as possible.

His principal devices are,

1. To hide from them the Lord's designs in permitting him thus to rage. Some of these I have noticed; and they should endeavour to keep them upon their minds. It is hard for them, during the violence of the storm, to conceive that any good can possibly arise from the experience of so much evil. But when the storm is over, they find that the Lord is still mindful of them. Now, though a young soldier may well be startled at the first onset in the field of battle, it seems possible, that those who have been often engaged, should at length gain confidence from the recollection of the many instances in which they have formerly found, by the event, that the Lord was surely with them in the like difficulties, and that their fears were only groundless and imaginary. When the warfare is hottest, they have still reason to say, "Hope thou in God; for I "shall yet praise him."

2. To make them utter impatient speeches, which do but aggravate their distress. It is said of Job, under his first trials, "In all this he sinned not with his lips, "nor charged God foolishly." So long Satan was unable to prevail. Afterwards he opened his mouth, as Jeremiah did likewise, and cursed the day of his birth. When he once began to complain, his causes of complaint increased. We cannot prevent dreadful thoughts from arising in our hearts; but we should be cautious

of giving them vent, by speaking unadvisedly. This is like letting in wind upon a smothering fire, which will make it burn more fiercely.

3. To persuade them that all they feel and tremble at arises immediately from their own hearts. Indeed, it is a most awful proof of our depravity, that we feel something within ready to close with the suggestions of the enemy, in defiance of our better judgment and desires. But it is not so in all cases. It is not always easy, nor is it needful, exactly to draw the line between the temptations of Satan and our own corruptions: but sometimes it is not impossible to distinguish them. When a child of God is prompted to blaspheme the name that he adores, or to commit such evils as even unsanctified nature would recoil at; the enemy has done it, and shall be answerable for the whole guilt. The soul in this case is passive, and suffers with extreme reluctance what it more dreads than the greatest evils which can affect the body. Nor do the deepest wounds of this kind leave a scar upon the conscience, when the storm is over; which is a proof that they are not our own act.

4. To drive them from the throne of grace. Prayer, which is at all times necessary, is especially so in a time of temptation. But how hard is it to come boldly, that we may obtain help in this time of need! but, however hard, it must be attempted. By discontinuing prayer, we give the enemy the greatest encouragement possible; for then he sees that his temptations have the effect which he intends by them, to intercept us from our strong hold. When our Lord was in an agony, he prayed the most earnestly; the ardour of his prayer increased with the distress of his soul. It would be happy if we could always imitate him in this: but too

often temptations and difficulties, instead of rousing our application, dishearten and enfeeble us; so that our cries are the faintest, when we stand most in need of assistance. But so long as prayer is restrained, our burden is increased. Psalm xxxii. 3. 5. If he cannot make them omit praying, he will repeatedly endeavour to weary them by working upon the legality which cleaves so close to the heart. Satan is a hard taskmaster, when he interferes in the performance of our spiritual duties. This he does perhaps more frequently than we think of; for he can, if it serves his purpose, appear as an angel of light. When the soul is in a tempest, and attempts to pray, he will suggest, that prayer on these occasions should be protracted to such a length, and performed with such steadiness, as is found to be at that season quite impracticable. Such constrained efforts are wearisome; and, from the manner of the performance, he takes occasion to fix fresh guilt upon the conscience. Short, frequent, and fervent petitions, which will almost necessarily arise from what is felt when temptation is violent, are best suited to the case; and we need not add to the burden, by tasking ourselves beyond our power, as if we expected to be heard for our much speaking. Blessed be God that we fight with an enemy already vanquished by our Lord, and that we have a sure promise of victory. The Lord is our banner.

I am, &c.

LETTER XV.

A Plan of a compendious Christian Library.

Dear Sir,

AN eager desire of reading many books, though it is often supposed to be the effect of a taste for knowledge, is perhaps a principal cause of detaining multitudes in ignorance and perplexity. When an unexperienced person thus ventures into the uncertain tide of opinions, he is liable to be hurried hither and thither with the changing stream; to fall in with every new proposal, and to be continually embarrassed with the difficulty of distinguishing between probability and truth. Or if, at last, he happily finds a clue to lead him through the labyrinth wherein so many have been lost, he will acknowledge, upon a review, that from what he remembers to have read, (for perhaps the greater part he has wholly forgotten,) he has gained little more than a discovery of what mistakes, uncertainty, insignificance, acrimony, and presumption, are often obtruded on the world under the disguise of a plausible title-page.

It is far from my intention to depreciate the value, or deny the usefulness of books, without exception: a few well-chosen treatises, carefully perused and thoroughly digested, will deserve and reward our pains; but a multiplicity of reading is seldom attended with a good effect. Besides the confusion it often brings upon the judgment and memory, it occasions a vast expense of time, indisposes for close thinking, and keeps us poor, in the midst of seeming plenty, by reducing us to

live upon a foreign supply, instead of labouring to improve and increase the stock of our own reflections.

Every branch of knowledge is attended with this inconvenience; but it is in no one more sensibly felt than when the inquiry is directed to the subject of religion. Perhaps no country has abounded so much with religious books as our own; many of them are truly excellent; but a very great number of those which are usually more obvious to be met with, as they stand recommended by great names, and the general taste of the public, are more likely to mislead an inquirer, than to direct him into the paths of true peace and wisdom.

And even in those books which are in the main agreeable to the word of God, there is often so great a mixture of human infirmity, so much of the spirit of controversy and party, such manifest defects in some, and so many unwarrantable additions to the simple truth of the Gospel in others, that, unless a person's judgment is already formed, or he has a prudent friend to direct his choice, he will be probably led into error or prejudice before he is aware, by his attachment to a favourite author.

Allowing, therefore, the advantage of a discreet and seasonable use of human writings, I would point out a still more excellent way for the acquisition of true knowledge: a method which, if wholly neglected, the utmost diligence in the use of every other means will prove ineffectual; but which, if faithfully pursued in an humble dependence upon the divine blessing, will not only of itself lead us by the straightest path to wisdom, but will also give a double efficacy to every subordinate assistance.

If I may be allowed to use the term *book* in a metaphorical sense, I may say, that the Most High God, in

condescension to the weakness of our faculties, the brevity of our lives, and our many avocations, has comprised all the knowledge conducive to our real happiness in four comprehensive volumes. The first, which may be considered as the text, is cheap, portable, and compendious, so that hardly any person in our favoured land, who is apprised of its worth, need be without it; and the other three, which are the best and fullest commentaries upon this, are always at hand for our perusal, and pressing upon our attention in every place and circumstance of our lives.

It will be easily apprehended, that by the first book or volume, I mean that perfect and infallible system of truth, the Bible. The internal characters of this book, arising from its comprehensiveness, simplicity, majesty, and authority, sufficiently prove to every enlightened mind, that it is given by inspiration of God. They who are competent judges of this evidence, are no more disturbed by the suggestions of some men reputed wise, that it is of human composition, than if they were told that men had invented the sun, and placed it in the firmament. Its fulness speaks its author. No case has yet occurred, or ever will, for which there is not a sufficient provision made in this invaluable treasury. Here we may seek, (and we shall not seek in vain,) wherewith to combat and vanquish every error, to illustrate and confirm every spiritual truth. Here are promises suited to every want, directions adapted to every doubt that can possibly arise. Here is milk for babes, meat for strong men, medicines for the wounded, refreshment for the weary. The general history of all nations and ages, and the particular experience of each private believer, from the beginning to the end of time, are wonderfully comprised in this single volume; so that whe-

ever reads and improves it aright, may discover his state, his progress, his temptations, his danger, and his duty, as distinctly and minutely marked out, as if the whole had been written for him alone. In this respect, as well as in many others, great is the mystery of godliness.

The simplicity, as well as the subject-matter of the Bible, evinces its divine original. Though it has depths sufficient to embarrass and confound the proudest efforts of unsanctified reason, it does not, as to its general import, require an elevated genius to understand it, but is equally addressed to the level of every capacity. As its contents are of universal concernment, they are proposed in such a manner as to engage and satisfy the inquiries of all; and the learned, with respect to their own personal interest, have no advantage above the ignorant. That it is in fact read by many who receive no instruction or benefit from it, is wholly owing to their inattention or vanity. This event may rather excite grief than wonder. The Bible teaches us to expect it. It forewarns us, that the natural man cannot receive the things of God, can neither understand nor approve them. It points out to us the necessity of a heavenly teacher, the Holy Spirit, who has promised to guide those who seek him by prayer into all necessary truth. They who implore his assistance, find the seals opened, the veil taken away, and the way of salvation made plain before them.

The language of the Bible is likewise clothed with inimitable majesty and authority. God speaks in it, and reveals the glory of his perfections, his sovereignty, holiness, justice, goodness, and grace, in a manner worthy of himself, though at the same time admirably adapted to our weakness. The most laboured efforts

of human genius are flat and languid, in comparison of those parts of the Bible which are designed to give us due apprehensions of the God with whom we have to do. Where shall we find such instances of the true sublime, the great, the marvellous, the beautiful, the pathetic, as in the Holy Scriptures? Again, the effects which it performs demonstrate it to be the word of God. With a powerful and penetrating energy, it alarms and pierces the conscience, discovers the thoughts and intents of the heart, convinces the most obstinate, and makes the most careless tremble. With equal authority and efficacy, it speaks peace to the troubled mind, heals the wounded spirit, and can impart a joy unspeakable and full of glory, in the midst of the deepest distress. It teaches, persuades, comforts, and reproves, with an authority that can neither be disputed nor evaded; and often communicates more light, motives, and influence, by a single sentence, to a plain unlettered believer, than he could derive from the voluminous commentaries of the learned. In a word, it answers the character the apostle gives it: "It is able "to make us wise unto salvation; it is completely and "alone sufficient to make the man of God perfect, "thoroughly furnished for every good work." The doctrines, histories, prophecies, promises, precepts, exhortations, examples, and warnings, contained in the Bible, form a perfect WHOLE, a complete summary of the will of God concerning us, in which nothing is wanting, nothing is superfluous.

The second volume which deserves our study is the book of Creation. "The heavens declare the glory of "God, and the firmament showeth his handy-work:" nor can we cast our eyes any where, without meeting innumerable proofs of his wisdom, power, goodness, and

presence. God is revealed in the least as well as in the greatest of his works. The sun and the glow-worm, the fabric of the universe, and each single blade of grass, are equally the effects of divine power. The lines of this book, though very beautiful and expressive in themselves, are not immediately legible by fallen man. The works of creation may be compared to a fair character in cypher, of which the Bible is the key; and without this key they cannot be understood. This book was always open to the Heathens; but they could not read it, nor discern the proofs of his eternal power and godhead which it affords. "They became vain in their "own imaginations, and worshipped the creature more "than the Creator." The case is much the same at this day with many reputed wise, whose hearts are not subjected to the authority of the Bible. The study of the works of God, independent of his word, though dignified with the name of *philosophy*, is no better than an elaborate trifling and waste of time. It is to be feared none are more remote from the true knowledge of God, than many of those who value themselves most upon their supposed knowledge of his creatures. They may speak in general terms of his wisdom; but they live without him in the world; and their philosophy cannot teach them either to love or serve, to fear or trust him. They who know God in his word, may find both pleasure and profit in tracing his wisdom in his works, if their inquiries are kept within due bounds, and in a proper subservience to things of greater importance; but they are comparatively few who have leisure, capacity, or opportunity for these inquiries. But the book of creation is designed for the instruction of all believers. If they are not qualified to be astronomers or anatomists, yet from a view of the heavens, the

work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars, which he hath created, they learn to conceive of his condescension, power, and faithfulness. Though they are unacquainted with the theory of light and colours, they can see in the rainbow a token of God's covenant-love. Perhaps they have no idea of the magnitude or distance of the sun; but it reminds them of Jesus the Son of righteousness, the source of light and life to their souls. The Lord has established a wonderful analogy between the natural and the spiritual world. This is a secret only known to them that fear him; but they contemplate it with pleasure; and almost every object they see, when they are in a right frame of mind, either leads their thoughts to Jesus, or tends to illustrate some Scriptural truth or promise. This is the best method of studying the book of Nature; and for this purpose it is always open and plain to those who love the Bible, so that he who runs may read.

The book of Providence is the third volume, by which those who fear the Lord are instructed. This likewise is inextricable and unintelligible to the wisest of men who are not governed by the word of God. But when the principles of Scripture are admitted and understood, they throw a pleasing light upon the study of Divine Providence, and at the same time are confirmed and illustrated by it. What we read in the Bible, of the sovereignty, wisdom, power, omniscience, and omnipresence of God, of his over-ruling all events to the accomplishment of his counsels and the manifestation of his glory, of the care he maintains of his church and people, and of his attention to their prayers, is exemplified by the history of nations and families, and the daily occurrences of private life. The believer receives hourly and indubitable proofs that the Lord

reigns; that verily there is a God that judges the earth. Hence arises a solid confidence: he sees that his concerns are in safe hands; and he needs not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord: while others live at an uncertainty, exposed to the impression of every new appearance, and, like a ship in a storm, without rudder or pilot, abandoned to the power of the winds and waves. In the history of Joseph, and in the Book of Esther, and indeed throughout the Bible, we have specimens of the wise unerring providence of God: what important consequences depend, under his management, upon the smallest events; and with what certainty seeming contingencies are directed to the issue which he has appointed. By these authentic specimens we learn to judge of the whole; and with still greater advantage by the light of the New Testament, which shows us, that the administration of all power in heaven and earth is in the hands of Jesus. The government is upon his shoulders: the King of Saints is King of nations, King of kings, and Lord of lords: not a sparrow falls to the ground, nor a hair from our heads, without his cognizance; and though his ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts; though his agency is vailed from the eye of sense by the intervention of second causes; yet faith perceives, acknowledges, admires, and trusts his management. This study, like the former, does not require superior natural abilities, but is obvious to the weakest and meanest of his people, so far as their own duty and peace are concerned.

The fourth volume is the book of the Heart, or of Human Nature, comprehending the experience of what passes within our own breasts, and the observations we make upon the principles and conduct of others, com-

pared with what we read in the word of God. The heart of man is deep; but all its principles and workings, in every possible situation, and the various manners in which it is affected by sin, by Satan, by worldly objects, and by grace, in solitude and in company, in prosperity and in affliction, are disclosed and unfolded in the Scripture. Many who are proud of their knowledge of what they might be safely ignorant of, are utter strangers to themselves. Having no acquaintance with the Scripture, they have neither skill nor inclination to look into their own hearts, nor any certain criterion whereby to judge of the conduct of human life. But the Bible teaches us to read this mysterious book also; shows us the source, nature, and tendency, of our hopes, fears, desires, pursuits, and perplexities; the reasons why we cannot be happy in ourselves, and the vanity and insufficiency of every thing around us to help us. The rest and happiness proposed in the Gospel, is likewise found to be exactly suitable to the desires and necessities of the awakened heart; and the conduct of those who reject this salvation, as well as the gracious effects produced in those who receive it, prove to a demonstration, that the word of God is indeed a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

My limits will admit but of a few hints upon these extensive subjects. I shall only observe, that whoever is well read in these four books, is a wise person, how little soever he may know of what the men of the world call science. On the other hand, though a man should be master of the whole circle of classical, polite, and philosophical knowledge, if he has no taste for the Bible, and has no ability to apply it to the works of creation and providence, and his own experience, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. I have pointed

out a treasure of more worth than all the volumes in the Vatican.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVI.

On the Inefficacy of our Knowledge.

Dear Sir,

TO be enabled to form a clear, consistent, and comprehensive judgment of the truths revealed in the Scripture, is a great privilege; but they who possess it are exposed to the temptation of thinking too highly of themselves, and too meanly of others, especially of those who not only refuse to adopt their sentiments, but venture to oppose them. We see few controversial writings, however excellent in other respects, but are tinctured with this spirit of self-superiority; and they who are not called to this service, if they are attentive to what passes in their hearts, may feel it working within them, upon a thousand occasions; though, so far as it prevails, it brings forcibly home to ourselves the charge of ignorance and inconsistence, which we are so ready to fix upon our opponents. I know nothing as a means more likely to correct this evil, than a serious consideration of the amazing difference between our acquired judgment, and our actual experience; or, in other words, how little influence our knowledge and judgment have upon our own conduct. This may confirm to us the truth and propriety of the apostle's observation, "If any man think that he knoweth any "thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." Not that we are bound to be insensible that the Lord

has taught us what we were once ignorant of; nor is it possible that we should be so; but because, if we estimate our knowledge by its effects, and value it no further than it is experimental and operative, (which is the proper standard whereby to try it,) we shall find it so faint and feeble as hardly to deserve the name.

How firmly, for instance, are we persuaded, in our judgments, that God is omnipresent! Great as the difficulties may be which attend our conceptions of this point, the truth itself is controverted by few. It is generally acknowledged by unawakened persons; and I may add, too frequently known even by believers, as if they knew it not. If the eyes of the Lord are in every place, how strong a guard should this thought be upon the conduct of those who profess to fear him! We know how we are often affected when in the presence of a fellow-worm; if he is one on whom we depend, or who is considerably our superior in life, how careful are we to compose our behaviour, and to avoid whatever might be deemed improper or offensive! Is it not strange that those who have taken their ideas of the divine majesty, holiness, and purity, from the Scriptures, and are not wholly insensible of their inexpressible obligations to regulate all they say or do by his precepts, should upon many occasions be betrayed into improprieties of behaviour, from which the presence of a nobleman, or prince, would have effectually restrained them, yea, sometimes perhaps even the presence of a child? Even in the exercise of prayer, by which we profess to draw near the Lord, the consideration that his eye is upon us has little power to engage our attention, or prevent our thoughts from wandering, like the fool's eyes, to the ends of the earth. What should we think of a person, who, being admitted into the king's

presence, upon business of the greatest importance, should break off in the midst of his address, to pursue a butterfly? Could such an instance of weakness be met with, it would be but a faint emblem of the inconsistencies which they who are acquainted with their own hearts can often charge themselves with in prayer. They are not wholly ignorant in what a frame of spirit it becomes a needy dependent sinner to approach that God, before whom the angels are represented as vailing their faces: yet, in defiance of their better judgment, their attention is diverted from him with whom they have to do, to the merest trifles; they are not able to realize that presence with which they believe themselves to be surrounded, but speak as if they were speaking into the air. Further, if our sense that God is always present was in any good measure answerable to the conviction of our judgment, would it not be an effectual preservative from the many importunate though groundless fears with which we are harassed? He says, "Fear not, I am with thee;" he promises to be a shield and a guard to those who put their trust in him; yet, though we profess to believe his word, and to hope that he is our protector, we seldom think ourselves safe even in the path of duty, a moment longer than danger is kept out of our view. Little reason have we to value ourselves upon our knowledge of this indisputable truth, when it has no more effective and habitual influence upon our conduct.

The doctrine of God's sovereignty likewise, though not so generally owned as the former, is no less fully assented to by those who are called *Calvinists*. We zealously contend for this point, in our debates with the *Arminians;* and are ready to wonder that any should be hardy enough to dispute the Creator's right

to do what he will with his own. While we are only engaged in defence of the election of grace, and have a comfortable hope that we are ourselves of that number, we seem so convinced, by the arguments the Scripture affords us in support of this truth, that we can hardly forbear charging our adversaries with perverse obstinacy and pride, for opposing it. Undoubtedly the ground of this opposition lies in the pride of the human heart: but this evil principle is not confined to any party; and occasions frequently arise, when they who contend for the divine sovereignty, are a little more practically influenced by it than their opponents. This humiliating doctrine concludes as strongly for submission to the will of God, under every circumstance of life, as it does for our acquiescing in his purpose to have mercy on whom he will have mercy. But, alas! how often do we find ourselves utterly unable to apply it, so as to reconcile our spirits to those afflictions which he is pleased to allot us. So far as we are enabled to say, when we are exercised with poverty, or heavy losses or crosses, "I was dumb and opened not my mouth, be-"cause thou didst it," so far, and no further, are we truly convinced, that God has a sovereign right to dispose of us, and all our concernments, as he pleases. How often, and how justly, at such seasons, might the argument we offer to others, as sufficient to silence all their objections, be retorted upon ourselves, "Nay, "but who art thou, O man, who repliest against God? "Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, "Why hast thou made me thus?" A plain proof that our knowledge is more notional than experimental. What an inconsistence, that while we think God is just and righteous, in withholding from others the things which pertain to their everlasting peace, we should find

it so hard to submit to his dispensations to ourselves in matters of unspeakably less importance!

But the Lord's appointments, to those who fear him, are not only sovereign, but wise and gracious. He has connected their good with his own glory, and is engaged, by promise, to make all things work together for their advantage. He chooses for his people better than they could choose for themselves: if they are in heaviness, there is a need-be for it, and he withholds nothing from them but what, upon the whole, it is better they should be without. Thus the Scriptures teach, and thus we profess to believe. Furnished with these principles, we are at no loss to suggest motives of patience and consolation to our brethren that are afflicted; we can assure them, without hesitation, that if they are interested in the promises, their concerns are in safe hands; that the things which at present are not joyous but grievous, shall in due season yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness, and that their trials are as certainly mercies as their comforts. We can prove to them, from the history of Joseph, David, Job, and other instances recorded in Scripture, that notwithstanding any present dark appearances, it shall certainly be well with the righteous; that God can and will make crooked things straight; and that he often produces the greatest good from those events which we are apt to look upon as evil. From hence we can infer, not only the sinfulness, but the folly of finding fault with any of his dispensations. We can tell them, that at the worst the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed; and that therefore, under the greatest pressures, they should so weep as those who expect in a little time to have all their tears wiped away. But when the case is our own,

when we are troubled on every side, or touched in the tenderest part, how difficult is it to feel the force of these reasonings, though we know they are true to a demonstration? Then, unless we are endued with fresh strength from on high, we are as liable to complain and despond, as if we thought our afflictions sprung out of the ground, and the Lord had forgotten to be gracious.

I might proceed to show the difference between our judgment when most enlightened, and actual experience, with respect to every spiritual truth. We know there is no proportion between time and eternity, between God and the creature, the favour of the Lord and the favour or the frowns of men; and yet often, when these things are brought into close competition, we are sorely put to it to keep steadfast in the path of duty; nay, without new supplies of grace, we should certainly fail in the time of trial, and our knowledge would have no other effect than to render our guilt more inexcusable. We seem to be as sure that we are weak, sinful, fallible creatures, as we are that we exist; and yet we are prone to act as if we were wise and good. In a word, we cannot deny, that a great part of our knowledge is as I have described it, like the light of the moon, destitute of heat and influence; and yet we can hardly help thinking of ourselves too highly upon the account of it.

May we not say with the Psalmist, "Lord, what is "man!" yea, what an enigma, what a poor inconsistent creature is a believer! In one view, how great is his character and privilege! He knows the Lord; he knows himself. His understanding is enlightened to apprehend and contemplate the great mysteries of the Gospel. He has just ideas of the evil of sin, the vanity

of the world, the beauties of holiness, and the nature of true happiness. He was once "darkness, but now "he is light in the Lord." He has access to God by Jesus Christ; to whom he is united, and in whom he lives by faith. While the principles he has received are enlivened by the agency of the Holy Spirit, he can do all things. He is humble, gentle, patient, watchful, faithful. He rejoices in afflictions, triumphs over temptation, lives upon the foretastes of eternal glory, and counts not his life dear, so he may glorify God his Saviour, and finish his course with joy. But his strength is not his own; he is absolutely dependent, and is still encompassed with infirmities, and burdened with a depraved nature. If the Lord withdraws his power, he becomes weak as another man, and drops, as a stone sinks to the earth by its own weight. His inherent knowledge may be compared to the windows of a house, which can transmit the light, but cannot retain it. Without renewed and continual communications from the Spirit of grace, he is unable to withstand the smallest temptation, to endure the slightest trial, to perform the least service in a due manner, or even to think a good thought. He knows this, and yet he too often forgets it. But the Lord reminds him of it frequently, by suspending that assistance without which he can do nothing. Then he feels what he is, and is easily prevailed upon to act in contradiction to his better judgment. Thus repeated experience of his own weakness teaches him by degrees where his strength lies; that it is not in any thing that he has already attained, or can call his own, but in the grace, power, and faithfulness of his Saviour. He learns to cease from his own understanding, to be ashamed of his best endeavours, to

abhor himself in dust and ashes, and to glory only in the Lord.

From hence we may observe, that believers who have most knowledge, are not therefore necessarily the most spiritual. Some may and do walk more honourably and more comfortably with two talents, than others with five. He who experimentally knows his own weakness, and depends simply upon the Lord, will surely thrive though his acquired attainments and abilities may be but small: and he who has the greatest gifts, the clearest judgment, and the most extensive knowledge, if he indulges high thoughts of his advantages, is in imminent danger of mistaking, and falling at every step; for the Lord will suffer none whom he loves to boast in themselves. He will guide the meek with his eye, and fill the hungry with good things; but the rich he sendeth empty away. It is an invariable maxim in his kingdom, That whosoever exalteth himself, shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVII.

On a Believer's Frames.

Dear Sir,

YOU ask me, in your letter, What should one do when one finds one's self always still, quiet, and stupid, except in the pulpit; is made useful there, but cannot get either comfort or sorrow out of it, or but very rarely? You describe a case which my own experience has made very familiar to me: I shall take the occasion to offer

you a few miscellaneous thoughts upon the subject of a believer's frames; and I send them to you, not by the post, but from the press; because I apprehend the exercise you speak of is not peculiar to you or to me, but is in a greater or less degree the burden of all who are spiritually minded, and duly attentive to what passes in their own hearts, whether they are in the ministry or not.

As you intimate, that you are in the main favoured with liberty and usefulness in the pulpit, give me leave to ask you, What you would do if you did not find yourself occasionally poor, insufficient, and, as you express it, stupid at other times? Are you aware of what might be the possible, the probable, the almost certain consequences, if you always found your spirit enlarged, and your frames lively and comfortable? Would you not be in great danger of being puffed up with spiritual pride? Would you not be less sensible of your absolute dependence upon the power of Christ, and of your continual need of his blood, pardon, and intercession? Would you not be quite at a loss to speak suitably and feelingly to the case of many gracious souls, who are groaning under those effects of a depraved nature, from which, upon that supposition, you would be exempted? How could you speak properly upon the deceitfulness of the heart, if you did not feel the deceitfulness of your own, or adapt yourself to the changing experiences through which your hearers pass, if you yourself were always alike, or nearly so? Or how could you speak pertinently of the inward warfare, the contrary principles of flesh and spirit fighting one against another, if your own spiritual desires were always vigorous and successful, and met with little opposition or control?

The apostle Paul, though favoured with a singular

eminency in grace, felt at times that he had no sufficiency in himself so much as to think a good thought; and he saw there was a danger of his being exalted above measure, if the Lord had not wisely and graciously tempered his dispensations to prevent it. By "being exalted above measure," perhaps there may be a reference not only to his spirit, lest he should think more highly of himself than he ought, but likewise to his preaching, lest, not having the same causes of complaint and humiliation in common with others, he should shoot over the heads of his hearers, confine himself chiefly to speak of such comforts and privileges as he himself enjoyed, and have little to say for the refreshment of those who were discouraged and cast down by a continual conflict with indwelling sin. The angel who appeared to Cornelius did not preach the Gospel to him, but directed him to send for Peter; for though the glory and grace of the Saviour seems a fitter subject for an angel's powers than for the poor stammering tongues of sinful men, yet an angel could not preach experimentally, nor describe the warfare between grace and sin from his own feelings. And if we could suppose a minister as full of comforts and as free from failings as an angel, though he would be a good and happy man, I cannot conceive that he would be a good or useful preacher; for he would not know how to sympathize with the weak and afflicted of the flock, or to comfort them under their difficulties with the consolations wherewith he himself in similar circumstances had been comforted of God. It belongs to your calling of God as a minister, that you should have a taste of the various spiritual trials which are incident to the Lord's people, that thereby you may possess the tongue of the learned, and know how to speak a word in season to them that

are weary; and it is likewise needful to keep you perpetually attentive to that important admonition, "Without me ye can do nothing."

Thus much, considering you as a minister. But we may extend the subject so as to make it applicable to believers in general. I would observe, therefore, that it is a sign of a sad declension, if one, who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, should be capable of being fully satisfied with any thing short of the light of his countenance, which is better than life. A resting in notions of Gospel-truth, or, in the recollection of past comforts, without a continual thirst for fresh communications from the fountain of life, is, I am afraid, the canker which eats away the beauty and fruitfulness of many professors in the present day; and which, if it does not prove them to be absolutely dead, is at least a sufficient evidence that they are lamentably sick. But if we are conscious of the *desire*, if we seek it carefully in the use of all appointed means, if we willingly allow ourselves in nothing which has a known tendency to grieve the Spirit of God, and to damp our sense of divine things; then, if the Lord is pleased to keep us short of those comforts which he has taught us to prize, and, instead of lively sensations of joy and praise, we feel a languor and deadness of spirit, provided we do indeed feel it, and are humbled for it, we have no need to give way to despondency or excessive sorrow; still the foundation of our hope, and the ground of our abiding joys is the same; and the heart may be as really alive to God, and grace as truly in exercise, when we walk in comparative darkness and see little light, as when the frame of our spirits is more comfortable. Neither the reality nor the measure of grace can be properly estimated by the degree of our sensible com-

forts. The great question is, How we are practically influenced by the word of God, as the ground of our hope, and as the governing rule of our tempers and conversation? The apostle exhorts believers to rejoice in the Lord always. He well knew that they were exposed to trials and temptations, and to much trouble, from an evil heart of unbelief; and he prevents the objections we might be ready to make, by adding, "And "again, I say, Rejoice;" As if he had said, I speak upon mature consideration; I call upon you to rejoice, not at some times only, but at all times; not only when upon the mount, but when in the valley; not only when you conquer, but while you are fighting; not only when the Lord shines upon you, but when he seems to hide his face. When he enables you to do all things, you are no better in yourselves than you were before; and when you feel you can do nothing, you are no worse. Your experiences will vary; but his love and promises are always unchangeable. Though our desires of comfort, and what we call lively frames, cannot be too importunate while they are regulated by a due submission to his will, yet they may be inordinate for want of such submission. Sinful principles may, and too often do, mix with and defile our best desires. I have often detected the two vile abominations Self-will and Self-righteousness insinuating themselves into this concern: like Satan, who works by them, they can occasionally assume the appearance of an angel of light. I have felt an impatience in my spirit, utterly unsuitable to my state as a sinner and a beggar, and to my profession of yielding myself and all my concerns to the Lord's disposal. He has mercifully convinced me that I labour under a complication of disorders, summed up in the word *sin;* he has graciously revealed himself to me as

the infallible physician; and has enabled me, as such, to commit myself to him, and to expect my cure from his hand alone. Yet how often, instead of thankfully accepting his prescriptions, have I foolishly and presumptuously ventured to prescribe to him, and to point out how I would have him deal with me! How often have I thought something was necessary which he saw best to deny, and that I could have done better without those dispensations which his wisdom appointed to work for my good? He is God, and not man, or else he would have been weary of me, and left me to my own management long ago. How inconsistent! to acknowledge that I am blind, to entreat him to lead me, and yet to want to choose my own way, in the same breath! I have limited the Holy One of Israel, and not considered that he magnifies his wisdom and grace in working by contraries, and bringing good out of seeming evil. It has cost me something to bring me to confess that he is wiser than I; but I trust, through his blessing, I have not suffered wholly in vain. My sensible comforts have not been great; the proofs I have had of the evils of my sinful nature, my incapacity and aversion to good, have neither been few nor small; but by these unpromising means I hope he has made his grace and salvation precious to my soul, and in some measure weaned me from leaning to my own understanding.

Again, self-righteousness has had a considerable hand in dictating many of my desires for an increase of comfort and spiritual strength. I have wanted some stock of my own. I have been wearied of being so perpetually beholden to him, necessitated to come to him always in the same strain, as a poor miserable sinner. I could have liked to have done something for myself in com-

mon, and to have depended upon him chiefly upon extraordinary occasions. I have found, indeed, that I could do nothing without his assistance, nor any thing even with it but what I have reason to be ashamed of. If this had only humbled me, and led me to rejoice in his all-sufficiency, it would have been well. But it has often had a different effect, to make me sullen, angry, and discontented, as if it was not best and most desirable that he should have all the glory of his own work, and I should have nothing to boast of, but that in the Lord I have righteousness and strength. I am now learning to glory only in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; to be content to be nothing, that he may be All in All. But I find this a hard lesson; and when I seem to have made some proficiency, a slight turn in my spirit throws me back, and I have to begin all again.

There is an inseparable connexion between causes and effects. There can be no effect without a cause, no active cause without a proportionable effect. Now indwelling sin is an active cause; and therefore while it remains in our nature, it will produce effects according to its strength. Why then should I be surprised that if the Lord suspends his influence for a moment, in that moment sin will discover itself? Why should I wonder that I can feel no lively exercise of grace, no power to raise my heart to God, any further than he is pleased to work in me mightily; any more than wonder that I do not find fire in the bottom of a well, or that it should not be day when the sun is withdrawn from the earth. Humbled I ought to be, to find I am so totally depraved; but not discouraged, since Jesus is appointed to me of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and since I find that, in the midst of

all this darkness and deadness, he keeps alive the principle of grace which he has implanted in my heart.

As to Mr. Rutherford's expression which you mention, that "there is no temptation like being without "temptation;" I allow it in a qualified sense, that is, it is better of the two to suffer from Satan's fiery darts, than to be lulled asleep, and drawn into a careless security, by his more subtle, though less perceptible devices; so as to grow indifferent to the means of grace, and sink into a worldly spirit, or, like the church of Laodicea, to imagine ourselves rich, and increased in goods, and that we have need of nothing. But I am persuaded this is not your case; the deadness you complain of, and which is a burden you groan under, is a very different thing. And I advise you to be cautious how you indulge a desire to be exercised with Satan's temptations, as supposing they would be conducive to make you more spiritual, or would of course open you a way to greater consolations. If you have such a desire, I may say to you in our Lord's words, "you "know not what you ask." He who knows our weakness, and the power of our adversary, has graciously directed us to pray, that we enter not into temptation. Have you considered what the enemy can do, if he is permitted to come in like a flood? In one hour he could raise such a storm as would put you to your wit's end. He could bring such a dark cloud over your mind, as would blot out all remembrance of your past comforts, or at least prevent you from deriving the least support from them. He could not only fight against your peace, but shake the very foundations of your hope, and bring you to question, not only your interest in the promises, but even to doubt of the most important and fundamental truths upon which your hopes

have been built. Be thankful, therefore, if the Lord restrains his malice. A young sailor is often impatient of a short calm; but the experienced mariner, who has been often tossed with tempests, and upon the point of perishing, will seldom wish for a storm. In a word, let us patiently wait upon the Lord, and be content to follow as he leads, and he will surely do us good.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

Thoughts on the Exercise of Social Prayer.

Sir,

I ACCOUNT it a great mercy, that at this time, when iniquity so generally abounds, there is a number, I hope a growing number, whose eyes affect their hearts, and who are stirred up to unite in prayer for the spread of Gospel-knowledge, and a blessing upon our sinful land. Meetings for social prayer are frequent in different parts of the kingdom, and amongst various denominations of Christians. As the Lord has promised, that when he prepares the heart to pray, he will graciously incline his ear to hear, who can tell but he may yet be entreated for us, and avert the heavy and justly-deserved judgments which seem to hang over us?

It is much to be desired, that our hearts might be so affected with a sense of divine things, and so closely engaged when we are worshipping God, that it might not be in the power of little circumstances to interrupt and perplex us, and to make us think the service wearisome, and the time which we employ in it tedious. But as our infirmities are many and great, and the enemy of

our souls is watchful to discompose us, if care is not taken by those who lead in social prayer, the exercise which is approved by the judgment, may become a burden, and an occasion of sin. Complaints of this kind are frequent, and might perhaps be easily rectified, if the persons chiefly concerned were spoken to in love. But as they are usually the last who hear of it, it may perhaps be of service to communicate a few remarks on a subject of such general concern.

The chief fault of some good prayers is, that they are too long; not that I think we should pray by the clock, and limit ourselves precisely to a certain number of minutes; but it is better of the two, that the hearers should wish the prayer had been longer, than spend half or a considerable part of the time in wishing it was over. This is frequently owing to an unnecessary enlargement upon every circumstance that offers, as well as to the repetition of the same things. If we have been copious in pleading for spiritual blessings, it may be best to be brief and summary in the article of intercession for others; or if the frame of our spirits, or the circumstances of affairs, lead us to be more large and particular in laying the cases of others before the Lord, respect should be had to this intention in the former part of the prayer. There are, doubtless, seasons when the Lord is pleased to favour those who pray with a peculiar liberty; they speak because they feel; they have a wrestling spirit, and hardly know how to leave off. When this is the case, they who join with them are seldom wearied, though the prayer should be protracted something beyond the usual limits. But I believe it sometimes happens, both in praying and in preaching, that we are apt to spin out our time to the greatest length, when we have in reality the least to say. Long prayers

should in general be avoided, especially where several persons are to pray successively; or else even spiritual hearers will be unable to keep up their attention. And here I would just notice an impropriety we sometimes meet with, that when a person gives expectation that he is just going to conclude his prayer, something not thought of in its proper place occurring that instant to his mind, leads him as it were to begin again. But unless it is a matter of singular importance, it would be better omitted for that time.

The prayers of some good men are more like preaching than praying. They rather express the Lord's mind to the people, than the desires of the people to the Lord. Indeed this can hardly be called prayer. It might in another place stand for part of a good sermon; but will afford little help to those who desire to pray with their hearts. Prayer should be sententious, and made up of breathings to the Lord, either of confession, petition, or praise. It should be not only scriptural and evangelical, but experimental, a simple and unstudied expression of the wants and feelings of the soul. It will be so if the heart is lively and affected in the duty; it must be so if the edification of others is the point in view.

Several books have been written to assist in the gift and exercise of prayer, as by Dr. Watts and others; and many useful hints may be borrowed from them; but a too close attention to the method and transitions therein recommended, gives an air of study and formality, and offends against that simplicity which is so essentially necessary to a good prayer, that no degree of acquired abilities can compensate for the want of it. It is possible to learn to pray mechanically, and by rule; but it is hardly possible to do so with acceptance, and

benefit to others. When the several parts of invocation, adoration, confession, petition, &c. follow each other in a stated order, the hearer's mind generally goes before the speaker's voice, and we can form a tolerable conjecture what is to come next. On this account we often find, that unlettered people, who have had little or no help from books, or rather have not been fettered by them, can pray with an unction and savour in an unpremeditated way, while the prayers of persons of much superior abilities, perhaps even of ministers themselves, are, though accurate and regular, so dry and starched, that they afford little either of pleasure or profit to a spiritual mind. The spirit of prayer is the fruit and token of the Spirit of adoption. The studied addresses with which some approach the throne of grace, remind us of a stranger's coming to a great man's door; he knocks and waits, sends in his name, and goes through a course of ceremony, before he gains admittance; while a child of the family uses no ceremony at all, but enters freely when he pleases, because he knows he is at home. It is true, we ought always to draw near the Lord with great humiliation of spirit and a sense of our unworthiness. But this spirit is not always best expressed or promoted by a pompous enumeration of the names and titles of the God with whom we have to do, or by fixing in our minds beforehand the exact order in which we propose to arrange the several parts of our prayer. Some attention to method may be proper, for the prevention of repetitions; and plain people may be a little defective in it sometimes; but this defect will not be half so tiresome and disagreeable as a studied and artificial exactness.

Many, perhaps most people who pray in public, have some favourite word or expression which recurs too

often in their prayers, and is frequently used as a mere expletive, having no necessary connexion with the sense of what they are speaking. The most disagreeable of these is, when the name of the blessed God, with the addition of perhaps one or more epithets, as, *Great*, *Glorious*, *Holy*, *Almighty*, *&c.* is introduced so often, and without necessity, as seems neither to indicate a due reverence in the person who uses it, nor suited to excite reverence in those who hear. I will not say, that this is taking the name of God in vain, in the usual sense of the phrase: it is, however, a great impropriety, and should be guarded against. It would be well if they who use redundant expressions, had a friend to give them a caution, as they might with a little care be retrenched; and hardly any person can be sensible of the little peculiarities he may inadvertently adopt, unless he is told of it.

There are several things likewise respecting the voice and manner of prayer, which a person may with due care correct in himself, and which, if generally corrected, would make meetings for prayer more pleasant than they sometimes are. These I shall mention by pairs, as the happy and agreeable way is a medium between two inconvenient extremes.

Very loud speaking is a fault, when the size of the place, and the number of hearers, do not render it necessary. The end of speaking is to be heard: And, when that end is attained, a greater elevation of the voice is frequently hurtful to the speaker, and is more likely to confuse a hearer than to fix his attention. I do not deny but allowance must be made for constitution, and the warmth of the passions, which dispose some persons to speak louder than others. Yet such will do well to restrain themselves as much as they can.

It may seem indeed to indicate great earnestness, and that the heart is much affected; yet it is often but false fire. It may be thought speaking with power; but a person who is favoured with the Lord's presence may pray with power in a moderate voice; and there may be very little power of the Spirit, though the voice should be heard in the street and neighbourhood.

The other extreme of speaking too low, is not so frequent, but, if we are not heard, we might as well altogether hold our peace. It exhausts the spirits, and wearies the attention, to be listening for a length of time to a very low voice. Some words or sentences will be lost, which will render what is heard less intelligible and agreeable. If the speaker can be heard by the person furthest distant from him, the rest will hear of course.

The tone of the voice is likewise to be regarded. Some have a tone in prayer, so very different from their usual way of speaking, that their nearest friends, if not accustomed to them, could hardly know them by their voice. Sometimes the tone is changed, perhaps more than once, so that if our eyes did not give us more certain information than our ears, we might think two or three persons had been speaking by turns. It is pity that when we approve what is spoken, we should be so easily disconcerted by an awkwardness of delivery; yet so it often is, and probably so it will be, in the present weak and imperfect state of human nature. It is more to be lamented than wondered at, that sincere Christians are sometimes forced to confess, "He is a good "man, and his prayers, as to their substance, are spi- "ritual and judicious; but there is something so dis- "pleasing in his manner, that I am always uneasy when "I hear him."

Contrary to this, and still more offensive, is a custom that some have of talking to the Lord in prayer. It is their natural voice indeed; but it is that expression of it which they use upon the most familiar and trivial occasions. The human voice is capable of so many inflections and variations, that it can adapt itself to the different sensations of our mind, as joy, sorrow, fear, desire, &c. If a man was pleading for his life, or expressing his thanks to the king for a pardon, common sense and decency would teach him a suitableness of manner; and any one who could not understand his language, might know by the sound of his words that he was not making a bargain, or telling a story. How much more, when we speak to the King of kings, should the consideration of his glory, and our own vileness, and of the important concerns we are engaged in before him, impress us with an air of seriousness and reverence, and prevent us from speaking to him as if he was altogether such a one as ourselves? The liberty to which we are called by the Gospel, does not at all encourage such a pertness and familiarity as would be unbecoming to use towards a fellow-worm who was a little advanced above us in worldly dignity.

I shall be glad if these hints may be of any service to those who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth, and who wish that whatever has a tendency to damp the spirit of devotion, either in themselves, or in others, might be avoided. It is a point of delicacy and difficulty to tell any one what we wish could be altered in his manner of prayer; but it can give no just offence to ask a friend, if he has read a letter on this subject, in *A Collection of Twenty-six Letters*, published in 1775.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIX.

On Controversy.

Dear Sir,

AS you are likely to be engaged in controversy, and your love of truth is joined with a natural warmth of temper, my friendship makes me solicitous on your behalf. You are of the strongest side; for truth is great, and must prevail; so that a person of abilities inferior to yours, might take the field with a confidence of victory. I am not, therefore, anxious for the event of the battle; but I would have you more than a conqueror, and to triumph not only over your adversary, but over yourself. If you cannot be vanquished, you may be wounded. To preserve you from such wounds as might give you cause of weeping over your conquests, I would present you with some considerations, which, if duly attended to, will do you the service of a coat of mail; such armour, that you need not complain, as David did of Saul's, that it will be more cumbersome than useful; for you will easily perceive it is taken from that great magazine provided for the Christian soldier, the word of God. I take it for granted, that you will not expect any apology for my freedom, and therefore I shall not offer one. For method sake, I may reduce my advice to three heads, respecting your opponent, the public, and yourself.

As to your opponent, I wish, that before you set pen to paper against him, and during the whole time you are preparing your answer, you may commend him by earnest prayer to the Lord's teaching and blessing.

This practice will have a direct tendency to conciliate your heart to love and pity him; and such a disposition will have a good influence upon every page you write. If you account him a believer, though greatly mistaken in the subject of debate between you, the words of David to Joab, concerning Absalom, are very applicable: "Deal gently with him for my sake." The Lord loves him and bears with him: therefore you must not despise him, or treat him harshly. The Lord bears with you likewise, and expects that you should show tenderness to others, from a sense of the much forgiveness you need yourself. In a little while you will meet in heaven; he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon earth is to you now. Anticipate that period in your thoughts; and though you may find it necessary to oppose his errors, view him personally as a kindred soul, with whom you are to be happy in Christ for ever. But if you look upon him as an unconverted person, in a state of enmity against God and his grace, (a supposition, which, without good evidence, you should be very unwilling to admit,) he is a more proper object of your compassion, than of your anger. Alas! "He knows not what he does." But you know who has made you to differ. If God, in his sovereign pleasure, had so appointed, you might have been as he is now; and he, instead of you, might have been set for the defence of the Gospel. You were both equally blind by nature. If you attend to this, you will not reproach or hate him, because the Lord has been pleased to open your eyes, and not his. Of all people who engage in controversy, we, who are called Calvinists, are most expressly bound by our own principles to the exercise of gentleness and moderation. If, indeed, they who differ from us have a power of changing them-

selves, if they can open their own eyes, and soften their own hearts, then we might with less inconsistence be offended at their obstinacy; but if we believe the very contrary to this, our part is, not to strive, but in meekness to instruct those who oppose, "if peradventure "God will give them repentance to the acknowledge-"ment of the truth." If you write with a desire of being an instrument of correcting mistakes, you will of course be cautious of laying stumbling-blocks in the way of the blind, or of using any expressions that may exasperate their passions, confirm them in their prejudices, and thereby make their conviction, humanly speaking, more impracticable.

By printing, you will appeal to the public; where your readers may be ranged under three divisions.—First, such as differ from you in principle. Concerning these I may refer you to what I have already said. Though you have your eye upon one person chiefly, there are many like-minded with him; and the same reasoning will hold, whether as to one or to a million. There will be likewise many who pay too little regard to religion, to have any settled system of their own, and yet are pre-engaged in favour of those sentiments which are least repugnant to the good opinion men naturally have of themselves. These are very incompetent judges of doctrines; but they can form a tolerable judgment of a writer's spirit. They know that meekness, humility, and love, are the characteristics of a Christian temper; and though they affect to treat the doctrines of grace as mere notions and speculations, which, supposing they adopted them, would have no salutary influence upon their conduct; yet from us, who profess these principles, they always expect such dispositions as correspond with the precepts of the Gospel. They

are quick-sighted to discern when we deviate from such a spirit, and avail themselves of it to justify their contempt of our arguments. The Scriptural maxim, That "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of "God," is verified by daily observation. If our zeal is embittered by expressions of anger, invective, or scorn, we may think we are doing service to the cause of truth when in reality we shall only bring it into discredit.—The weapons of our warfare, and which alone are powerful to break down the strong holds of error, are not carnal but spiritual; arguments fairly drawn from Scripture and experience, and enforced by such a mild address, as may persuade our readers, that, whether we can convince them or not, we wish well to their souls, and contend only for the truth's sake; if we can satisfy them that we act upon these motives, our point is half gained; they will be more disposed to consider calmly what we offer; and if they should still dissent from our opinions, they will be constrained to approve our intentions.

You will have a third class of readers, who being of your own sentiments, will readily approve of what you advance, and may be further established and confirmed in their views of the Scripture-doctrines, by a clear and masterly elucidation of your subject. You may be instrumental to their edification, if the law of kindness as well as of truth regulates your pen, otherwise you may do them harm. There is a principle of self, which disposes us to despise those who differ from us; and we are often under its influence, when we think we are only showing a becoming zeal in the cause of God. I readily believe, that the leading points of Arminianism spring from, and are nourished by, the pride of the human heart; but I should be glad if the reverse was al-

ways true; and that to embrace what are called the Calvinistic doctrines was an infallible token of an humble mind. I think I have known some Arminians, that is, persons, who for want of clearer light, have been afraid of receiving the doctrines of free grace, who yet have given evidence that their hearts were in a degree humbled before the Lord. And I am afraid there are Calvinists, who, while they account it a proof of their humility, that they are willing in words to debase the creature, and to give all the glory of salvation to the Lord, yet know not what manner of spirit they are of. Whatever it be that makes us trust in ourselves that we are comparatively wise or good, so as to treat those with contempt who do not subscribe to our doctrines, or follow our party, is a proof and fruit of a self-righteous spirit. Self-righteousness can feed upon doctrines, as well as upon works; and a man may have the heart of a Pharisee, while his head is stored with orthodox notions of the unworthiness of the creature, and the riches of free grace. Yea, I would add, the best of men are not wholly free from this leaven; and therefore are too apt to be pleased with such representations as hold up our adversaries to ridicule, and by consequence flatter our own superior judgments. Controversies, for the most part, are so managed as to indulge rather than to repress this wrong disposition; and therefore, generally speaking, they are productive of little good. They provoke those whom they should convince, and puff up those whom they should edify. I hope your performance will savour of a spirit of true humility, and be a means of promoting it in others.

This leads me, in the last place, to consider your own concern in your present undertaking. It seems a laudable service to defend the faith once delivered to

the saints; we are commanded to contend earnestly for it, and to convince gainsayers. If ever such defences were seasonable and expedient, they appear to be so in our day, when errors abound on all sides, and every truth of the Gospel is either directly denied, or grossly misrepresented. And yet we find but very few writers of controversy who have not been manifestly hurt by it. Either they grow in a sense of their own importance, or imbibe an angry, contentious spirit, or they insensibly withdraw their attention from those things which are the food and immediate support of the life of faith, and spend their time and strength upon matters which at most are but of a secondary value. This shows, that if the service is honourable, it is dangerous. What will it profit a man if he gains his cause, and silences his adversary, if at the same time he loses that humble tender frame of spirit in which the Lord delights, and to which the promise of his presence is made! Your aim, I doubt not, is good; but you have need to watch and pray, for you will find Satan at your right hand to resist you: he will try to debase your views; and though you set out in defence of the cause of God, if you are not continually looking to the Lord to keep you, it may become your own cause, and awaken in you those tempers which are inconsistent with true peace of mind, and will surely obstruct communion with God. Be upon your guard against admitting any thing personal into the debate. If you think you have been ill-treated, you will have an opportunity of showing that you are a disciple of Jesus, who, "when he "was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he "threatened not." This is our pattern, thus we are to speak and write for God, "not rendering railing for "railing, but contrariwise blessing; knowing that here-

"unto we are called." The wisdom that is from above is not only pure, but peaceable and gentle; and the want of these qualifications, like the dead fly in the pot of ointment, will spoil the savour and efficacy of our labours. If we act in a wrong spirit, we shall bring little glory to God, do little good to our fellow-creatures, and procure neither honour nor comfort to ourselves. If you can be content with showing your wit, and gaining the laugh on your side, you have an easy task; but I hope you have a far nobler aim, and that, sensible of the solemn importance of Gospel-truths, and the compassion due to the souls of men, you would rather be a means of removing prejudices in a single instance, than obtain the empty applause of thousands. Go forth, therefore, in the name and strength of the Lord of Hosts, speaking the truth in love; and may he give you a witness in many hearts, that you are taught of God, and favoured with the unction of his Holy Spirit.

I am, &c.

LETTER XX.

On Conformity to the World.

Dear Sir,

YOU will, perhaps, be surprised to see my thoughts on your query in print, rather than to receive them by the post, as you expected. But as the subject of it is of general concern, I hope you will not be displeased that I have taken this method. It would do honour to the pen of an able casuist, and might be of considerable service in the present day, clearly to explain the force of the apostle's precept, "Be not conformed to this

"world;" and to state the just boundary between a sinful compliance with the world, and that scrupulous singularity which springs from a self-righteous principle, and a contracted view of the spirit and liberty of the Gospel. To treat this point accurately, would require a treatise rather than a letter; I only undertake to offer you a few hints; and indeed, when the mind is formed to a spiritual taste, a simple desire to be guided by the Word and Spirit of God, together with a due attention to our own experience, will, in most practical cases, supersede the necessity of long and elaborate disquisitions.

By the world, in the passage alluded to, Rom. xii. 2. I suppose the apostle means the men of the world, in distinction from believers; these, not having the love of God in their hearts, or his fear before their eyes, are of course engaged in such pursuits and practices as are inconsistent with our holy calling, and in which we cannot imitate or comply with them, without hurting our peace and our profession. We are therefore bound to avoid conformity to them in all such instances; but we are not obliged to decline all intercourse with the world, or to impose restraints upon ourselves, when the Scripture does not restrain us, in order to make us as unlike the world as possible. To instance in a few particulars:

It is not necessary, perhaps it is not lawful, wholly to renounce the society of the world. A mistake of this kind took place in the early ages of Christianity, and men, (at first, perhaps, with a sincere desire of serving God without distraction,) withdrew into deserts and uninhabited places, and wasted their lives at a distance from their fellow-creatures. But unless we could flee from ourselves likewise, this would afford us no ad-

vantage; so long as we carry our own wicked hearts with us, we shall be exposed to temptation, go where we will. Besides, this would be thwarting the end of our vocation. Christians are to be the salt and the lights of the world, conspicuous as cities set upon a hill; they are commanded to "let their light shine before "men, that they, beholding their good works, may glo- "rify their Father who is in heaven." This injudicious deviation from the paths of nature and providence, gave occasion at length to the vilest abominations; and men who withdrew from the world, under pretence of retirement, became the more wicked and abandoned, as they lived more out of public view and observation.

Nor are we at liberty, much less are we enjoined, to renounce the duties of relative life, so as to become careless in the discharge of them. Allowances should, indeed, be made for the distresses of persons newly awakened, or under the power of temptation, which may for a time so much engross their thoughts as greatly to indispose them for their bounden duty. But, in general, the proper evidence of true Christians is, not merely that they can talk about divine things, but that, by the grace of God, they live and act agreeable to the rules of his word, in the state in which his providence has placed them, whether as masters or servants, husbands or wives, parents or children; bearing rule, or yielding obedience, as in his sight. Diligence and fidelity in the management of temporal concernments, though observable in the practice of many worldly men, may be maintained without a sinful conformity to the world.

Neither are we required to refuse a moderate use of the comforts and conveniences of life, suitable to the station which God has appointed us in the world. The

spirit of self-righteousness and will-worship works much in this way, and supposes that there is something excellent in long-fastings, in abstaining from pleasant food, in wearing meaner clothes than is customary with those in the same rank of life, and in many other austerities and singularities not commanded by the word of God. And many persons, who are in the main sincere, are grievously burdened with scruples respecting the use of lawful things. It is true, there is need of a constant watch, lest what is lawful in itself become hurtful to us by its abuse. But these outward strictnesses may be carried to great lengths, without a spark of true grace, and even without the knowledge of the true God. The mortifications and austerities practised by the Bramins in India, (if the accounts we have of them be true,) are vastly more severe than the most zealous effects of modern superstition in our country. There is a strictness which arises rather from ignorance than knowledge, is wholly conversant about externals, and gratifies the spirit of self as much in one way as it seems to retrench it in another. A man may almost starve his body to feed his pride: but to those who fear and serve the Lord, every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the precept is very extensive and important. "Be not conformed to the "world." As believers, we are strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Heaven is our country, and the Lord is our King. We are to be known and noticed as his subjects, and therefore it is his pleasure, that we do not speak the language, or adopt the customs, of the land in which we sojourn. We are not to conform to the world, as we did in the days of our ignorance. And though

we have received the principles of grace, and have tasted of the goodness of the Lord, the admonition is still needful; for we are renewed but in part, and are liable to be drawn aside to our hurt by the prevalence of evil examples and customs around us.

We must not conform to the spirit of the world. As members of society, we have a part to act in it in common with others. But if our business is the same, our principles and ends are to be entirely different. Diligence in our respective callings is, as I have already observed, commendable, and our duty: but not with the same views which stimulate the activity of the men of the world. If they rise early, and take rest late, their endeavours spring from and terminate in self, to establish and increase their own importance, to add house to house, and field to field, that, like the builders of Babel, they may get themselves a name, or provide means for the gratification of their sinful passions. If they succeed, they sacrifice to their own net; if they are crossed in their designs, they are filled with anxiety and impatience; they either murmur or despond. But a Christian is to pursue his lawful calling with an eye to the providence of God, and with submission to his wisdom. Thus, so far as he acts in the exercise of faith, he cannot be disappointed. He casts his care upon his Heavenly Father, who has promised to take care of him. What he gives, he receives with thankfulness, and is careful as a faithful steward to improve it for the furtherance of the cause of God, and the good of mankind; and if he meets with losses and crosses, he is not disconcerted, knowing that all his concerns are under a divine direction; that the Lord whom he serves, chooses for him better than he could choose for himself; and that his best treasure is safe, out of the reach of the

various changes to which all things in the present state are liable.

We must not conform to the maxims of the world. The world in various instances calls evil good, and good evil. But we are to have recourse to the law and to the testimony, and to judge of things by the unerring word of God, uninfluenced by the determination of the great or the many. We are to obey God rather than man, though upon this account we may expect to be despised or reviled, to be made a gazing-stock or a laughing-stock to those who set his authority at defiance. We must bear our testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus, avow the cause of his despised people, and walk in the practice of universal obedience, patiently endure reproaches, and labour to overcome evil with good. Thus we shall show that we are not ashamed of HIM. And there is an hour coming when he will not be ashamed of us, who have followed him, and borne his cross in the midst of a perverse generation, but will own our worthless names before the assembled world.

We must not conform to the world in their amusements and diversions. We are to mix with the world so far as our necessary and providential connexions engage us; so far as we have a reasonable expectation of doing or getting good, and no further. "What fellowship hath light with darkness, or what concord "hath Christ with Belial?" What call can a believer have into those places and companies, where every thing tends to promote a spirit of dissipation; where the fear of God has no place; where things are purposely disposed to inflame or indulge corrupt and sinful appetites and passions, and to banish all serious thoughts of God and ourselves? If it is our duty to redeem time, to walk with God, to do all things in the name of our Lord

Jesus Christ, to follow the example which he set us when he was upon earth, and to work out our salvation with fear and trembling; it must of course be our duty to avoid a conformity with the world in those vain and sensual diversions, which stand in as direct contradiction to a spiritual frame of mind as darkness to light.

The leading desires of every person under the influence of Gospel-principles, will be to maintain an habitual communion with God in his own soul, and to manifest the power of his grace in the sight of men. So far as a Christian is infected by a conformity to the spirit, maxims, and sinful customs of the world, these desires will be disappointed. Fire and water are not more opposite than that peace of God which passeth all understanding, and that poor precarious pleasure which is sought in a compliance with the world; a pleasure, (if worthy the name,) which grieves the Spirit of God, and stupifies the heart. Whoever, after having tasted that the Lord is gracious, has been prevailed on to make the experiment, and to mingle with the world's vanities, has certainly thereby brought a damp upon his experience, and indisposed himself for the exercise of prayer, and the contemplation of divine truths. And if any are not sensible of a difference in this respect, it is because the poison has taken a still deeper effect, so as to benumb their spiritual senses. Conformity to the world is the bane of many professors in this day. They have found a way, as they think, to serve both God and Mammon. But because they are double-minded, they are unstable; they make no progress; and, notwithstanding their frequent attendance upon ordinances, they are lean from day to day; a form of godliness, a scheme of orthodox notions they may attain to, but they will remain destitute of the life, power, and comfort of

religion, so long as they cleave to those things which are incompatible with it.

Conformity to the world is equally an obstruction in the way of those who profess a desire of glorifying God in the sight of men. Such professors do rather dishonour him; by their conduct, as far as in them lies, they declare that they do not find the religion of the Gospel answer their expectations; that it does not afford them the satisfaction they once hoped for from it; and that therefore they are forced to seek relief from the world. They grieve the people of God by their compliances, and oftentimes they mislead the weak, and by their examples encourage them to venture upon the like liberties, which otherwise they durst not have attempted. They embolden the wicked likewise in their evil ways, while they see a manifest inconsistence between their avowed principles and their practice; and thus they cause the ways of truth to be evil spoken of. The paper constrains me to conclude abruptly: may the Lord enable you and me to lay this subject to heart, and to pray that we may, on the one hand, rightly understand and prize our Christian liberty; and, on the other hand, be preserved from that growing evil, a conformity to the world!

I am, &c.

LETTER XXI.

I was once BLIND, *but now I* SEE.

Dear Sir,

THE question, What is the discriminating characteristic nature of a work of grace upon the soul? has been

upon my mind; if I am able to give you satisfaction concerning it, I shall think my time well employed.

The reason why men in a natural state are utterly ignorant of spiritual truths is, that they are wholly destitute of a faculty suited to their perception. A remarkable instance we have in the absurd construction which Nicodemus put upon what our Lord had spoken to him concerning the new birth. And in the supernatural communication of this spiritual faculty, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, I apprehend the inimitable and abiding criterion, which is the subject of our inquiry, does primarily consist. Those passages of Scripture wherein the gospel-truth is compared to light, lead to a familiar illustration of my meaning. Men by nature are stark blind with respect to this light; by grace the eyes of the understanding are opened. Among a number of blind men, some may be more ingenious and of better capacity than others. They may be better qualified for such studies and employments which do not require eye-sight than many who can see, and may attain to considerable skill in them; but with respect to the true nature of light and colours, they are all exactly upon a level. A blind man, if ingenious and inquisitive, may learn to talk about the light, the sun, or the rainbow, in terms borrowed from those who have seen them; but it is impossible that he can have, (I mean a man born blind,) a just idea of either; and whatever hearsay-knowledge he may have acquired, he can hardly talk much upon these subjects without betraying his real ignorance. The case of one mentioned by Mr. Locke has been often quoted. He believed, that after much inquiry and reflection, he had at last found out what scarlet was; and being asked to explain himself, "I think," says he, "scarlet is something like the sound of a

"trumpet." This man had about the same knowledge of natural light as Nicodemus had of spiritual. Nor can all the learning or study in the world enable any person to form a suitable judgment of divine truth, till the eyes of his mind are opened, and then he will perceive it at once.

Indeed, this comparison is well suited to show the entire difference between nature and grace, and to explain the ground of that enmity and scorn which fills the hearts of blinded sinners, against those who profess to have been enlightened by the Spirit of God. The reason why blind men are not affronted when we tell them they cannot see, seems to be, that they are borne down by the united testimony of all who are about them. Every one talks of seeing; and they find by experience, that those who say they can see can do many things which the blind cannot. Some such conviction as this many have, who live where the Gospel is preached, and is made the power of God to the salvation of others. The conversation and conduct of the people of God convinces them, that there is a difference, though they cannot tell wherein it consists. But if we could suppose it possible, that there was a whole nation of blind men, and one or two persons should go amongst them, and profess that they could see, while they could not offer them such a proof of their assertion as they were capable of receiving, nor even explain, to their satisfaction, what they meant by sight; what may we imagine would be the consequence? I think there is little doubt but these innovators would experience much the same treatment as the believers of Jesus often meet with from a blind world. The blind people would certainly hate and despise them for presuming to pretend to what *they* had not. They would try to dispute them out of their senses, and bring

many arguments to prove, that there could be no such thing as either light or sight. They would say, as many say now, How is it, if these things are so, that *we* should know nothing of them? Yea, I think it probable, they would rise against them as deceivers and enthusiasts, and disturbers of the public peace, and say, "Away "with such fellows from the earth; it is not fit that "they should live." But if we should suppose further, that during the heat of the contest some of these blind men should have their eyes suddenly opened, the dispute as to them would be at an end in a minute; they would confess their former ignorance and obstinacy, confirm the testimony of those whom they had before despised, and of course share in the same treatment from their blind brethren, perhaps be treated still worse, as apostates from the opinion of the public.

If this illustration is justly applicable to our subject, it may lead us to several observations, or inferences, which have a tendency to confirm what we are elsewhere expressly taught by the word of God.

In the first place, it shows, that regeneration, or that great change without which a man cannot see the kingdom of God, is the effect of Almighty power. Neither education, endeavours, nor arguments, can open the eyes of the blind. It is God alone, who at first caused light to shine out of darkness, who can shine into our hearts, "to give us the light of the knowledge of the "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." People may attain some natural ideas of spiritual truths by reading books, or hearing sermons, and may thereby become wise in their own conceits; they may learn to imitate the language of an experienced Christian; but they know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm, and are as distant from the true meaning of the terms,

as a blind man, who pronounces the words *blue* or *red,* is from the ideas which those words raise in the mind of a person who can distinguish colours by his sight. And from hence we may infer the sovereignty, as well as the efficacy, of grace; since it is evident, not only that the objective light, the word of God, is not afforded universally to all men; but that those who enjoy the same outward means, have not all the same perceptions. There are many who stumble in the noon-day, not for want of light, but for want of eyes: and they who now see were once blind even as others, and had neither power nor will to enlighten their own minds. It is a mercy, however, when people are so far sensible of their own blindness, as to be willing to wait for the manifestation of the Lord's power, in the ordinances of his own appointment. He came into the world, and he sends forth his Gospel, that those who see not may see; and when there is a desire raised in the heart for spiritual sight, it shall in his due time be answered.

From hence likewise we may observe the proper use and value of the preaching of the Gospel, which is the great instrument by which the Holy Spirit opens the blind eyes. Like the rod of Moses, it owes all its efficacy to the appointment and promise of God. Ministers cannot be too earnest in the discharge of their office; it behooves them to use all diligence to find out acceptable words, and to proclaim the whole counsel of God. Yet when they have done all, they have done nothing, unless their word is accompanied to the heart by the power and demonstration of the spirit. Without this blessing, an apostle might labour in vain; but it shall be in a measure afforded to all who preach the truth in love, in simplicity, and in an humble dependence upon him who alone can give success. This in a

great measure puts all faithful ministers on a level, notwithstanding any seeming disparity in gifts and abilities. Those who have a lively and pathetic talent, may engage the ear, and raise the natural passions of their hearers; but they cannot reach the heart. The blessing may be rather expected to attend the humble than the voluble speaker.

Further we may remark, that there is a difference in kind, between the highest attainments of nature, and the effects of grace in the lowest degree. Many are convinced, who are not truly enlightened; are afraid of the consequences of sin, though they never saw its evil: have a seeming desire of salvation, which is not founded upon a truly spiritual discovery of their own wretchedness, and the excellency of Jesus. These may, for a season, hear the word with joy, and walk in the way of professors; but we need not be surprised if they do not hold out, for they have no root. Though many such fall, the foundation of God still standeth sure. We may confidently affirm, upon the warrant of Scripture, that they who, having for a while escaped the pollutions of the world, are again habitually entangled in them, or who, having been distressed upon the account of sin, can find relief in a self-righteous course, and stop short of Christ, "who is the end of the law for righ-" teousness to every one that believeth;" we may affirm that these, whatever profession they may have made, were never capable of receiving the beauty and glory of the Gospel-salvation. On the other hand, though, where the eyes are divinely enlightened, the soul's first views of itself and of the Gospel may be confused and indistinct, like him who saw men as it were trees walking; yet this light is like the dawn, which, though weak and

faint at its first appearance, shineth more and more unto the perfect day. It is the work of God; and his work is perfect in kind, though progressive in the manner. He will not despise or forsake the day of small things. When he thus begins, he will make an end; and such persons, however feeble, poor, and worthless, in their own apprehensions, if they have obtained a glimpse of the Redeemer's glory, as he is made unto us, of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that his name is precious, and the desire of their hearts is towards him, have good reason to hope and believe, as the wife of Manoah did in a similar case, that if the Lord had been pleased to kill them, he would not have showed them such things as these.

Once more: This spiritual sight and faculty is that which may be principally considered as inherent in a believer. He has no stock of grace, or comfort, or strength in himself. He needs continual supplies; and if the Lord withdraws from him, he is as weak and unskilful, after he has been long engaged in the Christian warfare, as he was when he first entered upon it. The eye is of little present use in the dark; for it cannot see without light. But the return of light is no advantage to a blind man. A believer may be much in the dark; but his spiritual sight remains. Though the exercise of grace may be low, he knows himself, he knows the Lord, he knows the way of access to a throne of grace. His frames and feelings may alter; but he has received such a knowledge of the person and offices, the power and grace of Jesus the Saviour, as cannot be taken from him; and he could withstand even an angel that should preach another gospel, because he has *seen*

the Lord. The paper constrains me to break off. May the Lord increase his light in your heart, and in the heart of, &c.

LETTER XXII.

On the Advantages of a State of Poverty.

My Dear Friend,

I CONFESS myself almost ashamed to write to you. You are pinched by poverty, suffer the want of many things; and your faith is often sharply tried, when you look at your family, and perhaps can hardly conceive how you shall be able to supply them with bread to the end of the week. The Lord has appointed me a different lot. I am favoured, not only with the necessaries, but with the comforts of life. Now I could easily give you plenty of good advice; I could tell you, it is your duty to be patient, and even thankful, in the lower state; that if you have bread and water, it is more than you deserve at the Lord's hands; and that, as you are out of hell, and made a partaker of the hope of the Gospel, you ought not to think any thing hard that you meet with in the way to heaven. If I should say thus, and say no more, you would not dispute the truth of my assertions; but, as coming from me, who live at ease, to you, who are beset with difficulties, you might question their propriety, and think that I know but little of my own heart, and could feel but little for your distress. You would probably compare me to one who should think himself a mariner, because he had studied the art of navigation by the fire-side, though he had never seen the sea. Yet I hope, by my frequent converse with the

Lord's poor, (for I live in the midst of an afflicted and poor people,) I have made some observations, which, though not strictly the fruit of my own experience, may not be wholly unseasonable or unacceptable to you.

Whether the rich or the poor, who live without God in the world, are most to be pitied, is not easy to determine. It is a dreadful case to be miserable in both worlds; but yet the parade and seeming prosperity in which some live for a few years, will be no abatement, but rather a great aggravation, of their future torment. A madman is equally to be pitied, whether he is laid upon a bed of state or a bed of straw. Madness is in the heart of every unregenerate sinner; and the more he possesses of this world's goods, he is so much the more extensively mischievous. Poverty is so far a negative good to those who have no other restraint, that it confines the effects of the evil heart within narrower bounds, and the small circle of their immediate connexions: whereas the rich, who live under the power of sin, are unfaithful stewards of a larger trust, and by their pernicious influence are often instrumental in diffusing profaneness and licentiousness through a country or a kingdom; besides the innumerable acts of oppression, and the ravages of war, which are perpetrated to gratify the insatiable demands of luxury, ambition, and pride. But to leave this, if we turn our eyes from the false maxims of the world, and weigh things in the balance of the sanctuary, I believe we shall find, that the believing poor, though they have many trials which call for our compassion, have some advantages above those of the Lord's people to whom he has given a larger share of the good things of the present life. Why else does the apostle say, "God has chosen the poor?" or why do we see, in fact, that so few of the rich, or wise,

or mighty, are called? Certainly he does not choose them because they are poor; for "he is no respecter "of persons;" rather I think we may say, that knowing what is in their hearts, the nature of the world through which they are to pass, and what circumstances are best suited to manifest the truth and efficacy of his grace, he has, in the general, chosen poverty as the best state for them. Some exceptions he has made, that his people may not be wholly without support and countenance, and that the sufficiency of his grace may be made known in every state of life; but, for the most part, they are a poor and afflicted people: and in this appointment he has had a regard to their honour, their safety, and their comfort. I have room for but a very brief illustration of these particulars.

Sanctified poverty is an honourable state; not so indeed in the judgment of the world; the rich have many friends, the poor are usually despised. But I am speaking of that honour which cometh from God only. The poor, who are "rich in faith, and heirs of the "kingdom," are honoured with the nearest external conformity to Jesus their Saviour; who, though he was Lord of all, was pleased for our sakes to make himself so poor that he had not where to lay his head, and submitted to receive assistance from the contributions of his followers; Luke viii. 3. By this astonishing humiliation, he poured contempt upon all human glory, and made the state of poverty honourable; and now "he that reproaches the poor, despiseth his maker." And as he was, so were his apostles in the world. They were not only destitute of rank, titles, and estates, but were often in hunger and nakedness, and had no certain dwelling-place. To infer from hence, as some have done, that riches, and the accommodations of life, are

unsuitable to the state of a Christian, is the mark of a superstitious and legal spirit. There were in those days several believers that were in a state of affluence; as for instance, Theophilus, whom Luke addresses by a title of honour, Κρατιστε, most noble or excellent; the same which St. Paul ascribes to the Roman Governor. But we may safely infer, that that state of life in which our Lord was pleased to converse with men, and which was the lot of his apostles, and most favoured servants, is honourable in the sight of God.

Again: Poverty is honourable, because it affords a peculiar advantage for glorifying God, and evidencing the power of his grace, and the faithfulness of his promises, in the sight of men. A believer, if rich, lives by faith; and his faith meets with various trials. He himself knows by whom he stands; but it is not ordinarily so visible to others, as in the case of the poor. When ministers speak of the all-sufficiency of God to those who trust in him, and the certain effect of the principles of the Gospel, in supporting, satisfying, and regulating the mind of man, the poor are the best and most unsuspected witnesses for the truth of their doctrine. If we are asked, Where do these wonderful people live, who can delight themselves in God, esteem a day in his courts better than a thousand, and prefer the light of his countenance to all earthly joy? we can confidently send them to the poor of the flock. Amongst the number who are so called, there are some who will not disappoint our appeal. Let the world, who refuse to believe the preachers, believe their own eyes; and when they see a poor person content, thankful, rejoicing, admiring the Lord's goodness for affording him what they account hard fare, and, in the midst of various pressures, in-

capable of being bribed by offers, or terrified by threats, to swerve a step from the path of known duty, let them acknowledge that this is the finger of God. If they harden themselves against this evidence, "neither would "they be persuaded, though one should arise from the "dead."

And as poverty is an honourable, so it is comparatively a safe state. True, it is attended with its peculiar temptations; but it is not near so suitable to draw forth and nourish the two grand corruptions of the heart, self-importance, and an idolatrous cleaving to the world, as the opposite state of riches. They who are rich in this world, and who know the Lord and their own hearts, feel the wisdom and propriety of the apostle's charge, "Not to be high-minded, nor to trust in uncer-"tain riches." If poor believers consider the snares to which their rich brethren are exposed, they will rather pray for and pity, than envy them. Their path is slippery; they have reason to cry continually "Hold "thou me up, and I shall be safe:" for they live in the midst of the hurries and vanities of the world, are engaged in a large sphere of action, and are incessantly exposed to interruptions and snares. The carriage of all around them reminds them of their supposed consequence; and, by the nature of their situation, they are greatly precluded from plain dealing and friendly advice. But the poor are not surrounded with flatterers, nor teased with impertinences. They meet with little to stimulate their pride, or to soothe their vanity. They not only believe in their judgments, but are constrained to feel, by the experience of every day, that this world cannot afford them rest. If they have food and raiment, and grace therewith to be content, they have reason to be thankful for an exemption from those splendid

cares, and delusive appearances, which are the inseparable attendants of wealth and worldly distinction; and which, if not more burdensome, are, humanly speaking, much more dangerous, and greater impediments to the progress of a spiritual life, than the ordinary trials of the poor.

The believing poor have likewise, for the most part, the advantage in point of spiritual comfort; and that principally in two respects. First, As they are called to a life of more immediate dependence upon the promise and providence of God, (having little else to trust to,) they have a more direct and frequent experience of his interposition in their favour. Obadiah was a servant of God, though he lived in the court of Ahab. He, doubtless, had his difficulties in such a situation; but he was not in want. He had not only enough for himself in a time of dearth, but was able to impart to others. We may believe, that he well knew he was indebted to the Lord's goodness for his provision; but he could hardly have so sweet, so strong, so sensible an impression of God's watchful care over him as Elijah had, who, when he was deprived of all human support, was statedly fed by the ravens. Such of the Lord's people who have estates in land, or thousands in the bank, will acknowledge, that even the bread they eat is the gift of the Lord's bounty; yet, having a moral certainty of a provision for life, I should apprehend that they cannot exercise faith in the divine Providence, with respect to their temporal supplies, so distinctly as the poor, who, having no friend or resource upon earth, are necessitated to look immediately to their Father who is in heaven for their daily bread. And though it is not given to the world to know what an intercourse is carried on between heaven and earth, nor

with what acceptance the prayers of the poor and afflicted enter into the ears of the Lord of hosts; yet many of them have had such proofs of his attention, wisdom, faithfulness, power, and love, in supplying their wants, and opening them a way of relief, when they have been beset with difficulties on all sides, as have been, to themselves at least, no less certain and indisputable, I had almost said no less glorious, than the miracles which he wrought for Israel when he divided the Red-sea before them, and gave them food from the clouds. Such evidences of the power of faith, the efficacy of prayer, and the truth of the Scriptures, (preferable to mountains of gold and silver, and for which the state of poverty furnishes the most frequent occasions,) are a rich overbalance for all its inconveniences. But,

Secondly, I apprehend that the humble and believing poor have, in general, the greatest share of those consolations which are the effect of the light of God's countenance lifted up upon the soul, of his love shed abroad in the heart, or of a season of refreshment from his presence. By such expressions as these, the Scripture intimates that "joy unspeakable and full of glory;" a description of which those who have tasted it will not require, and those who are strangers to it could not understand. This joy is not always the companion of faith, not even of strong faith; but it is that which a believer, whether rich or poor, incessantly thirsts after; and, in comparison whereof, all worldly good is but vanity and disappointment. The Lord imparts this joy to his people, in season and measure, as he sees fit: but his poor people have the largest share. They have little comfort from the world, therefore he is pleased to be their comforter. They have many trials and sufferings; and he with whom they have to do knows their situation

and pressures: he has promised to make their strength equal to their day, and to revive their fainting spirits with heavenly cordials. When it is thus with them, they can say, with Jacob, "I have enough;" or, as it is in the original, "I have all." This makes hard things easy, and the burden light, which the flesh would otherwise complain of as heavy. This has often given a sweeter relish to bread and water, than the sensualist ever found in the most studied and expensive refinements of luxury. Blessed are the poor who are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to them that love him. They often enjoy the most lively foretastes of the glory which shall be revealed.

Have not you, my friend, found these things true in your own experience? Yes; the Lord has sanctified your crosses, and supported you under them. Hitherto he has helped you, and he will be with you to the end. As you have followed him upon earth, you will ere long follow him to heaven. "You are now called to sow "in tears, there you shall reap in joy, and God shall "wipe all tears from your eyes." In the meantime, be thankful that he honours you, in appointing you to be a witness for the truth and power of his grace, in the midst of an unbelieving world.

It is true, that even where the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. You have sharp trials, which, for the present, cannot be joyous, but grievous; and you have, doubtless, felt the depravity of your nature, and the subtlety of Satan, at sometimes prompting you to impatience, envy, and distrust. But these evils are not peculiar to a state of poverty; you would have been exposed to the same had you lived in affluence, together with many others, from which you are now exempted: for riches and poverty are but comparative terms, and

it is only the grace of God can teach us to be content in any possible situation of life. The rich are as prone to desire something which they have not as the poor; and they who have most to lose, have most to fear. That a man's life, (the happiness of his life,) "consisteth "not in the abundance of the things which he possess-"eth," is an aphorism founded upon the highest authority, and confirmed by universal experience and observation.

In a word, you are not poor, but rich. The promises are your inheritance:—heaven is your home;—the angels of the Lord are ministering spirits, who rejoice to watch over you for good; and the Lord of angels himself is your sun and shield, and everlasting portion. It is impossible that you, to whom he has given Himself, his Son, his Spirit, his grace, his kingdom, can want any thing that is truly good for you. If riches were so, he could pour them upon you in abundance, as easily as he provides you your daily bread. But these, for the most part, he bestows on those who have no portion but in the present life. You have great reason to rejoice in the lot he has appointed for you, which secures you from numberless imaginary wants and real dangers, and furnishes you with the fairest opportunities for the manifestation, exercise, and increase of the graces he has implanted in you. Influenced by these views, I trust you can cheerfully say,

> What others value, I resign:
> Lord, 'tis enough that thou art mine.

I commend you to the blessing of our covenant God, and to Jesus our Saviour, "who, when he was rich, "made himself poor for our sakes, that we through his "poverty might be rich."

I am, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

On Simplicity and Godly Sincerity.

Dear Sir,

IT would be a happy time if all professors of the Gospel could, with the apostle, rejoice in the testimony of their consciences, that they walked in simplicity and godly sincerity. How many evils and scandals would be then prevented! But, alas! too many who name the name of Christ seem to have hardly any idea of this essential part of the Christian character. A few thoughts upon a subject so little attended to may not be unseasonable. The most advanced in the Christian life have something of this lesson yet to learn; and the greater proficiency we make in it, the greater will be our inward peace, and the more will our light shine before men, to the glory of our heavenly Father.

Simplicity and sincerity, though inseparable, may be distinguished. The former is the principle from which the latter is derived. Simplicity primarily respects the frame of our spirit in the sight of God; sincerity more directly regards our conduct as it falls under the observation of men. It is true, the terms are frequently used indifferently for each other, and may be so without occasioning any considerable mistake: but as they are not precisely the same, it may be proper, if we would speak accurately, to keep this distinction in view.

Some persons who have been more enamoured with the *name* of Simplicity than acquainted with its *nature*, have substituted in its stead a childishness of language and manners, as if they understood the word *simple*

only in the mere vulgar sense, as equivalent to *foolish.* But this infantine softness gives just disgust to those who have a true taste and judgment of divine things; not only as it is an unnecessary deviation from the common usages of mankind, but because, being the effect of art and imitation, it palpably defeats its own pretences. An artificial or affected simplicity is a contradiction in terms, and differs as much from the simplicity of the Gospel as paint does from beauty.

The true simplicity, which is the honour and strength of a believer, is the effect of a spiritual perception of the truths of the Gospel. It arises from, and bears a proportion to the sense we have of our own unworthiness, the power and grace of Christ, and the greatness of our obligations to him. So far as our knowledge of these things is vital and experimental, it will make us simple-hearted. This simplicity may be considered in two respects: a simplicity of intention—and a simplicity of dependence. The former stands in opposition to the corrupt workings of self, the latter to the false reasonings of unbelief.

Simplicity of intention implies, that we have but one leading aim, to which it is our deliberate and unreserved desire, that every thing else in which we are concerned may be subordinate and subservient. In a word, that we are devoted to the Lord, and have by grace been enabled to choose him, and to yield ourselves to him, so as to place our happiness in his favour, and to make his glory and will the ultimate scope of all our actions. He well deserves this from us. He is the all-sufficient good. He alone is able to satisfy the vast capacity he has given us; for he formed us for himself: and they who have tasted he is gracious, know that "his loving kindness is better than life;" and that his pre-

sence and fulness can supply the want, or make up the loss of all creature-comforts. So likewise he has a just claim to us that we should be wholly his: for, besides that, as his creatures, we are in his hand as clay in the hands of the potter, he has a redemption-title to us. He loved us, and bought us with his own blood. He did not hesitate or halt between two opinions, when he engaged to redeem our souls from the curse of the law, and the power of Satan. He could, in the hour of his distress, have summoned legions of angels, (had that been needful,) to his assistance, or have destroyed his enemies with a word or a look; he could easily have saved himself: but how then could his people have been saved, or the promises of the Scripture have been fulfilled? Therefore he willingly endured the cross, he gave his back to the smiters, he poured out his blood, he laid down his life. Here was an adorable simplicity of intention in him; and shall we not, O thou lover of souls! be simply, heartily, and wholly thine? Shall we refuse the cup of affliction from thy hand, or for thy sake? Or shall we desire to drink of the cup of sinful pleasure, when we remember what our sins have cost thee? Shall we wish to be loved by the world that hated thee, or to be admired by the world that despised thee? Shall we be ashamed of professing our attachment to such a Saviour? Nay, Lord, forbid it. Let thy love constrain us, let thy name be glorified, and thy will be done by us and in us. "Let "us count all things loss and dung, for the excellency "of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord." Let us not desire any thing thou seest fit to withhold, nor repine to part with what thou callest for; nor even take pleasure in what thou bestowest, unless we can improve it for thee, and ever prefer thy love above our chief temporal joy! Such is the language of the heart that is

blessed with Gospel-simplicity. It was once the stronghold of sin, the throne of self; but now self is cast down, and Jesus rules by the golden sceptre of love. This principle preserves the soul from low, sordid, and idolatrous pursuits, will admit of no rival near the beloved, nor will it yield either to the bribes or threats of the world.

There is likewise a simplicity of dependence. Unbelief is continually starting objections, magnifying and multiplying difficulties. But faith in the power and promises of God, inspires a noble simplicity, and casts every care upon him, who is able and has engaged to support and provide. Thus, when Abraham, at the Lord's call, forsook his country and his father's house, the apostle observes, " He went out, not knowing whither he " went." It was enough that he knew *whom he followed.* The all-sufficient God was his guide, his shield, and his exceeding great reward. So when exercised with long waiting for the accomplishment of a promise, he staggered not, ου διεκριθη, he did not dispute or question, but simply depended upon God, who had spoken, and was able also to perform. So likewise when he received that hard command, to offer up his son, of whom it was said, " In Isaac shall thy seed be called," he simply obeyed, and depended upon the Lord to make good his own word, Heb. xi. 18, 19. In this spirit David went forth to meet Goliah, and overcame him: and thus the three worthies were unawed by the threats of Nebuchadnezzar, and rather chose to be cast into a burning furnace than to sin against the Lord. And thus Elijah in a time of famine, was preserved from anxiety and want, and supported by extraordinary methods, 1 Kings i. 14. In these times we do not expect miracles, in the strict sense of the word; but they who simply de-

pend upon the Lord, will meet with such tokens of his interposition in a time of need, as will, to themselves at least, be a satisfying proof that he careth for them. How comfortable is it to us, as well as ornamental to our profession, to be able to trust the Lord in the path of duty! To believe that he will supply our wants, direct our steps, plead our cause, and control our enemies! Thus he has promised, and it belongs to Gospel-simplicity to take his word against all discouragements. This will animate us in the use of all lawful means, because the Lord has commanded us to wait upon him in them: but it will likewise inspire confidence and hope when all means seem to fail, Hab. iii. 17, 18. For want of this dependence many dishonour their profession, and even make shipwreck of the faith. Their hearts are not simple; they do not trust in the Lord, but lean unto their own understandings, and their hopes or fears are influenced by worms like themselves. This causes a duplicity of conduct. They fear the Lord, and serve other gods. By their language, at some times, one would suppose they desire to serve the Lord only; but, as if they feared that he was not able to protect or provide for them, they make a league with the world, and seek either security or advantage from sinful compliances. These cannot rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience. They must live miserably. They are attempting to reconcile what our Lord has declared to be utterly incompatible, the service of God and Mammon. They have so much sense of religion as embitters their worldly pursuits; and so much regard to the world as prevents their receiving any real comfort from religion. These are the lukewarm professors, neither hot nor cold; neither approved of men, nor accepted of God. They can attend upon ordinances, and speak

like Christians; but their tempers are unsanctified, and their conduct irregular and blameable. They are not simple; and therefore they cannot be sincere.

I need not take time to prove, that the effect of simplicity will be sincerity. For they who love the Lord above all, who prefer the light of his countenance to thousands of gold and silver, who are enabled to trust him with all their concerns, and would rather be at his disposal than at their own, will have but little temptation to insincerity. The principles and motives upon which their conduct is formed, are the same in public as in private. Their behaviour will be all of a piece, because they have but *one design*. They will speak the truth in love, observe a strict punctuality in their dealings, and do unto others as they would others should do unto them; because these things are essential to their great aim of glorifying and enjoying their Lord. A fear of dishonouring his name, and of grieving his spirit, will teach them not only to avoid gross and known sins, but to abstain from all appearance of evil. Their conduct will therefore be consistent; and they will be enabled to appeal to all who know them, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not in fleshly "wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their "conversation in the world."

To a sincere Christian, that craft and cunning which passes for wisdom in the world, appears to be not only unlawful but unnecessary. He has no need of the little reserves, evasions, and disguises, by which designing men endeavour, (though often in vain,) to conceal their proper characters, and to escape deserved contempt. He is what he seems to be, and therefore is not afraid of being *found out*. He walks by the light of the wisdom that is from above, and leans upon the arm of al-

mighty power; therefore he walks at liberty, trusting in the Lord, whom he serves with his spirit in the Gospel of his Son.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXIV.

On Communion with God.

Dear Sir,

THOUGH many authors have written largely and well concerning communion with God, I shall not refer you to books, or have recourse to them myself; but, in compliance with your request, shall simply offer you what occurs to my thoughts upon the subject. I propose not to exceed the limits of a sheet of paper, and must therefore come immediately to the point.

That God is to be worshipped, is generally acknowledged; but that they who worship him in spirit, and in truth, have real fellowship and communion with him, is known only to themselves. The world can neither understand nor believe it. Many who would not be thought to have cast off all reverence for the Scripture, and therefore do not choose flatly to contradict the apostle's testimony, 1 John i. 3, attempt to evade its force by restraining it to the primitive times. They will allow that it might be so then; but they pretend that circumstances with us are greatly altered. Circumstances are, indeed, altered with us, so far, that men may now pass for Christians who confess and manifest themselves strangers to the Spirit of Christ: but who can believe that the very nature and design of Christianity should alter in the course of time? and that communion with

God, which was essential to it in the apostle's days, should be now so unnecessary and impracticable, as to expose all who profess an acquaintance with it, to the charge of enthusiasm and folly? However, they who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, will not be disputed out of their spiritual senses. If they are competent judges whether they ever saw the light, or felt the beams of the sun, they are no less certain that, by the knowledge of the Gospel, they are brought into a state of communion with God.

Communion presupposes union. By nature we are strangers, yea, enemies to God; but we are reconciled, brought nigh, and become his children, by faith in Christ Jesus. We can have no true knowledge of God, desire towards him, access unto him, or gracious communications from him, but in and through the Son of his love He is the medium of this inestimable privilege: for he is the way, the only way, of intercourse between heaven and earth; the sinner's way to God, and God's way of mercy to the sinner. If any pretend to know God, and to have communion with him, otherwise than by the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, and by faith in his name, it is a proof that they neither know God nor themselves. God, if considered abstracted from the revelation of himself in the person of Jesus, is a consuming fire; and if he should look upon us without respect to his covenant of mercy established in the Mediator, we could expect nothing from him but indignation and wrath. But when his Holy Spirit enables us to receive the record which he has given of his Son, we are delivered and secured from condemnation; we are accepted in the Beloved; we are united to him in whom all the fulness of the Godhead substantially dwells,

and all the riches of divine wisdom, power, and love, are treasured up. Thus in him, as the temple wherein the glory of God is manifested; and by him, as the representative and high priest of his people; and through him, as the living head of his mystical body the church, believers maintain communion with God. They have meat to eat which the world knows not of, honour which cometh of God only, joy which a stranger intermeddleth not with. They are for the most part poor and afflicted, frequently scorned and reproached, accounted hypocrites or visionaries, knaves or fools; but this one thing makes amends for all, "they have fellowship with "the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

I would observe further, that as the incarnation of that Mighty One, on whom our help is laid, was necessary, that a perfect obedience to the law, and a complete and proper atonement for sin, might be accomplished in the human nature that had sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God; so, in another view, it affords us unspeakable advantage for our comfortable and intimate communion with God by him. The adorable and awful perfections of Deity are softened, if I may so speak, and rendered more familiar and engaging to our apprehensions, when we consider them as resident in him, who is very bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; and who, having by himself purged our sins, is now seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high, and reigns in the nature of man, over all, God blessed for ever. Thus he who knows our frame, by becoming man like ourselves, is the supreme and ultimate object of that philanthropy, that human affection, which he originally implanted in us. He has made us susceptible of the endearments of friendship and relative life; and he ad-

mits us to communion with himself under the most engaging characters and relations, as our friend, our brother, and our husband.

They who, by that faith which is of the operation of God, are thus united to him in Christ, are brought thereby into a state of real habitual communion with him. The degree of its exercise and sensible perception on our parts, is various in different persons, and in the same person at different times; for it depends upon the communications we receive from the Lord, the Spirit, who distributes to every man severally according to his will, adjusting his dispensations with a wise and merciful respect to our present state of discipline. If we were wholly freed from the effects of a depraved nature, the snares of an evil world, and the subtle temptations of Satan, our actual communion with God would be always lively, sensible, and fervent. It will be thus in heaven; there its exercise will be without obstruction, abatement, or interruption. But so long as we are liable to security, spiritual pride, indolence, an undue attachment to worldly things, and irregular distempered passions, the Lord is pleased to afford, increase, suspend, or renew, the sensible impressions of his love and grace, in such seasons and measures as he sees most suitable to prevent or control these evils, or to humble us for them. We grieve his Spirit, and he withdraws; but, by his secret power over our hearts, he makes us sensible of our folly and loss, teaches us to mourn after him, and to entreat his return. These desires, which are the effects of his own grace, he answers in his own time, and shines forth upon the soul with healing in his beams. But such is our weakness, and so unapt are we to retain even those lessons which we have learnt by painful experience, that we are prone to repeat our

former miscarriages, and to render a repetition of the same changes necessary. From hence it is that what we call our *frames* are so very variable, and that our comfortable sense of divine communion is rather transient than abiding. But the communion itself, upon which the life and safety of our souls depend, is never totally obstructed; nor can it be, unless God should be unmindful of his covenant, and forsake the work of his own hands. And when it is not perceptible to sense, it may ordinarily be made evident to faith, by duly comparing what we read in the Scripture with what passes in our hearts. I say *ordinarily*, because there may be some excepted cases. If a believer is unhappily brought under the power of some known sin, or has grievously and notoriously declined from his profession, it is possible that the Lord may hide himself behind so dark a cloud, and leave him for a while to such hardness of heart, as that he shall seem to himself to be utterly destitute and forsaken. And the like apprehensions may be formed under some of Satan's violent temptations, when he is permitted to come in as a flood, and to overpower the apparent exercise of every grace by a torrent of blasphemous and evil imaginations. Yet the Lord is still present with his people in the darkest hours, or the unavoidable event of such cases would be apostasy or despair. Psalm xli. 11.

The communion we speak of comprises a mutual intercourse and communication in love, in counsels, and in interests.

In love. The Lord, by his Spirit, manifests and confirms his love to his people. For this purpose he meets them at his throne of grace, and in his ordinances. There he makes himself known unto them, as he does not unto the world; causes his goodness to pass before

them; opens, applies, and seals to them his exceeding great and precious promises; and gives them the Spirit of adoption, whereby, unworthy as they are, they are enabled to cry, "Abba, Father." He causes them to understand that great love wherewith he has loved them, in redeeming them by price and by power, washing them from their sins in the blood of the Lamb, recovering them from the dominion of Satan, and preparing for them an everlasting kingdom, where they shall see his face, and rejoice in his glory. The knowledge of this his love to them, produces a return of love from them to him. They adore him, and admire him; they make an unreserved surrender of their hearts to him. They view him, and delight in him as their God, their Saviour, and their portion. They account his favour better than life. He is the sun of their souls: if he is pleased to shine upon them, all is well, and they are not greatly careful about other things; but if he hides his face, the smiles of the whole creation can afford them no solid comfort. They esteem one day or hour spent in the delightful contemplation of his glorious excellencies, and in the expression of their desires towards him, better than a thousand; and when their love is most fervent, they are ashamed that it is so faint, and chide and bemoan themselves that they can love him no more. This often makes them long to depart, willing to leave their dearest earthly comforts, that they may see him as he is, without a vail or cloud; for they know that then, and not till then, they shall love him as they ought.

In counsels. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. He deals familiarly with them. He calls them not servants only, but friends; and he treats them as friends. He affords them more than promises;

for he opens to them the plan of his great designs from everlasting to everlasting; shows them the strong foundations and inviolable securities of his favour towards them, the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of his love, which passeth knowledge, and the unsearchable riches of his grace. He instructs them in the mysterious conduct of his providence, the reasons and ends of all his dispensations in which they are concerned; and solves a thousand hard questions to their satisfaction, which are inexplicable to the natural wisdom of man. He teaches them likewise the beauty of his precepts, the path of their duty, and the nature of their warfare. He acquaints them with the plots of their enemies, the snares and dangers they are exposed to, and the best methods of avoiding them. And he permits and enables them to acquaint him with all their cares, fears, wants, and troubles, with more freedom than they can unbosom themselves to their nearest earthly friends. His ear is always open to them; he is never weary of hearing their complaints, and answering their petitions. The men of the world would account it a high honour and privilege to have an unrestrained liberty of access to an earthly king; but what words can express the privilege and honour of believers, who, whenever they please, have audience of the King of kings, whose compassion, mercy, and power, are, like his majesty, infinite. The world wonders at their indifference to the vain pursuits and amusements by which others are engrossed; that they are so patient in trouble, so inflexible in their conduct, so well satisfied with that state of poverty and obscurity which the Lord, for the most part, allots them; but the wonder would cease, if what passes in secret were publicly known. They have obtained the pearl of great price; they have

communion with God; they derive their wisdom, strength, and comfort from on high, and cast all their cares upon him who, they assuredly know, vouchsafes to take care of them. This reminds me of another branch of their communion, namely,

In interests. The Lord claims them for his portion, he accounts them his jewels, and their happiness in time and eternity is the great end which, next to his own glory, and in inseparable connexion with it, he has immediately and invariably in view. In this point all his dispensations of grace and providence shall finally terminate. He himself is their guide and their guard; he keeps them as the apple of his eye; the hairs of their head are numbered, and not an event in their lives takes place but in an appointed subserviency to their final good. And as he is pleased to espouse *their* interest, they, through grace, are devoted to *his*. They are no longer their own, they *would not* be their own; it is their desire, their joy, their glory, to live to him who died for them. He has won their hearts by his love, and made them a willing people in the day of his power. The glory of his name, the success of his cause, the prosperity of his people, the accomplishment of his will, these are the great and leading objects which are engraven upon their hearts, and to which all their prayers, desires, and endeavours, are directed. They would count nothing dear, not even their lives, if set in competition with these. In the midst of their afflictions, if the Lord is glorified, if sinners are converted, if the church flourishes, they can rejoice. But when iniquity abounds, when love waxes cold, when professors depart from the doctrines of truth, and the power of godliness, then they are grieved and pained to the heart;

then they are touched in what they account their nearest interest, because it is their Lord's.

This is the spirit of a true Christian. May the Lord increase it in us, and in all who love his name! I have room only to subscribe myself, &c.

LETTER XXV.

On Faith, and the Communion of Saints.

Dear Sir,

IN compliance with your request, I freely give you my sentiments on the particulars you desired; your candour will pass over all inadvertencies, when I give you such thoughts as offer themselvs spontaneously, and without study. If the Lord is pleased to bring any thing valuable to my mind, I shall be glad to send it to you; and I am willing to believe that when Christians, in his name and fear, are writing to one another, he does often imperceptibly guide us to drop "a word in sea-"son;" which I hope will be the case at present.

The first object of solicitude to an awakened soul, is *safety*. The law speaks, the sinner hears and fears: a holy God is revealed, the sinner sees and trembles; every false hope is swept away; and an earnest inquiry takes place, "What shall I do to be saved?" In proportion as faith is given, Jesus is discovered as the only Saviour, and the question is answered; and as faith increases, fear subsides and a comfortable hope of life and immortality succeeds.

When we have thus "a good hope through grace," that heaven shall be our home, I think the next inquiry

is, or should be, How we may possess as much of heaven by the way as is possible? In other words, How a life of communion with our Lord and Saviour may be maintained in the greatest power, and with the least interruption that is consistent with the present imperfect state of things? I am persuaded, dear Sir, this is the point that lies nearest your heart; and therefore I shall speak freely my mind upon it.

In the first place, it is plain from Scripture and experience, that all our abatements, declensions, and languors, arise from a defect of faith; from the imperfect manner in which we take up the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Scripture. If our apprehensions of him were nearly suitable to the characters he bears in the word of God; if we had a strong and abiding sense of his power and grace always upon our hearts; doubts and complaints would cease. This would make hard things easy, and bitter things sweet, and dispose our hearts with cheerfulness to do and suffer the whole will of God; living upon and to him, as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, joy, and supreme end, we should live a heaven upon earth. The face of the question is therefore a little changed, and amounts to this, What are the means to increase and strengthen our faith?

I apprehend that the growth of faith, no less than of all other graces of which faith is the root, is gradual, and ordinarily effected in the use of appointed means; yet not altogether arbitrary, but appointed by him who knows our frame; and therefore works in us, in a way suited to those capacities he has endued us with.

I. If faith arises from the knowledge of Christ, and this knowledge is only contained in the word of God, it follows, that a careful, frequent perusal of the Scrip-

tures, which testify of him, is a fit and a necessary means of improving our faith.

II. If, besides the outward revelation of the word, there must be a revelation of the Spirit of God likewise, whose office it is "to take of the things of Jesus, "and show them to the soul," by, and according to the written word, John xvi. 14. 2 Cor. iii. 18.; and if this spirit is *promised* and *limited* to those who *ask* it;—then it follows likewise, that secret prayer is another necessary means of strengthening faith. Indeed, these two I account the prime ordinances. If we were providentially, and not wilfully restrained from all the rest, the word of grace, and the throne of grace, would supply their wants; with these we might be happy in a dungeon, or in a desert; but nothing will compensate the neglect of these. Though we should be engaged in a course of the best conversation and sermons, from one end of the week to the other, we should languish and starve in the midst of plenty; our souls would grow dry and lean, unless these secret exercises are kept up with some degree of exactness.

III. Another means to this purpose, is faithfulness to light already received, John xiv. 15—24. especially verse 21. It is worth observation, that faith and fidelity, the act of dependence, and the purpose of obedience, are expressed in the Greek by the same word. Though the power is all of God, and the blessing of mere free grace; yet if there is any secret reserve, any allowed evil connived at in the heart and life, this will shut up the avenues to comfort, and check the growth of faith. I lay very little stress upon that faith or comfort which is not affected by unsteady walking.

The experience of past years has taught me to distinguish between ignorance and disobedience. The

Lord is gracious to the weakness of his people; many involuntary mistakes will not interrupt their communion with him: he pities their infirmity, and teaches them to do better. But if they dispute his known will, and act against the dictates of conscience, they will surely suffer for it. This will weaken their hands, and bring distress into their hearts. Wilful sin sadly perplexes and retards our progress. May the Lord keep us from it! It raises a dark cloud, and hides the Sun of Righteousness from our view; and till he is pleased freely to shine forth again, we can do nothing: and for this perhaps he will make us wait, and cry out often, "How long, O "Lord! how long?"

Thus, by reading the word of God, by frequent prayer, by a simple attention to the Lord's will, together with the use of public ordinances, and the observations we are able to make upon what passes within us and without us, which is what we call *experience*, the Lord watering and blessing with the influence of his Holy Spirit, may grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour; be more humble in our own eyes, more weaned from self, more fixed on him as our all in all, till at last we shall meet before his throne.

The communion of saints, another point you desired my thoughts upon, is the great privilege of all the children of God; they may be separate from each other in body, and yet may daily meet at the throne of grace. This is one branch of the communion of saints, to be present in spirit to each other; sharing in common of the influences of the same spirit, they feel the same desires, aim at the same objects, and, so far as they are personally acquainted, are led to bear each other upon their hearts in prayer. It has often been an encouragement to me in a dark and dull hour, when rather the

constraint of duty, than the consideration of privilege, has brought me upon my knees, to reflect how many hearts, and eyes, and hands, have been probably lifted up in the same moment with mine; this thought has given me new courage. O what a great family has our Father! and what David says of the natural is true of the spiritual life, Psalm civ. "These wait all upon thee; "that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. "That thou givest them, they gather: thou openest "thine hand, and they are filled with good." Then I particularly think of those who have been helpful to me in time past; the seasons of sweet communion we have enjoyed together, the subjects of our mutual complaints, &c. Where are they, or how engaged now? Perhaps this moment praying or thinking about me. Then I am roused to make their cases my own, and by attempting to plead for them, I get strength to pray for myself. It is an encouragement, no doubt, in a field of battle, to know that the army we belong to is large, unanimous, all in action, pressing on from every side against the common enemy, and gaining ground in every attack. But if we derive fresh spirits from considering our friends and associates on earth, how should we take fire if we could penetrate within the vail, and take a view of the invisible world! We should not then complain that we were serving God alone. O the numbers, the voices, the raptures, of that heavenly host! Not one complaining note, not one discordant string. How many thousand years has the harmony been strengthening by the hourly accession of new voices!

I sometimes compare this earth to a temporary gallery or stage, erected for all the heirs of glory to pass over, that they may join in the coronation of the Great King: a solemnity in which they shall not be mere

spectators, but deeply-interested parties; for he is their husband, their Lord; they bear his name, and shall share in all his honours. Righteous Abel led the van; —the procession has been sometimes broader, sometimes narrowed to almost a single person, as in the days of Noah. After many generations had successively entered and disappeared, the King himself passed on in person, preceded by one chosen harbinger; he received many insults on his passage; but he bore all for the sake of those he loved, and entered triumphant into his glory.

He was followed by twelve faithful servants, and after them the procession became wider than ever. There are many yet unborn who must, (as we do now,) tread in the steps of those gone before; and when the whole company is arrived, the stage shall be taken down and burnt.

Then all the chosen race shall meet before the throne,
Shall bless the conduct of his grace, and make his wonders known.

Let us then, dear Sir, be of good courage; all the saints on earth, all the saints in heaven, the angels of the Lord, yea, the Lord of angels himself, all are on our side. Though the company is large, yet there is room;—many mansions;—a place for you;—a place, I trust, for worthless me.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXVI.

On the gradual Increase of Gospel-Illumination.

Dear Sir,

THE day is now breaking, how beautiful its appearance! how welcome the expectation of the approaching sun! It is this thought makes the dawn agreeable, that it is the presage of a brighter light; otherwise, if we expect no more day than it is this minute, we should rather complain of darkness, than rejoice in the early beauties of the morning. Thus the life of grace is the dawn of immortality: beautiful beyond expression, if compared with the night and thick darkness which formerly covered us; yet faint, indistinct, and unsatisfying, in comparison of the glory which shall be revealed.

It is, however, a sure earnest; so surely as we now see the light of the Sun of Righteousness, so surely shall we see the Sun himself, Jesus the Lord, in all his glory and lustre. In the mean time, we have reason to be thankful for a measure of light to walk and work by, and sufficient to show us the pits and snares by which we might be endangered: and we have a promise, that our present light shall grow stronger and stronger, if we are diligent in the use of the appointed means, till the messenger of Jesus shall lead us within the vail, and then farewell shades and obscurity for ever.

I can now almost see to write, and shall soon put the extinguisher over my candle: I do this without the least reluctance, when I enjoy a better light; but I should have been unwilling half an hour ago. Just thus, methinks, when the light of the glorious Gospel shines into

the heart, all our former feeble lights, our apprehensions, and our contrivances, become at once unnecessary and unnoticed. How cheerfully did the apostle put out the candle of his own righteousness, attainments, and diligence, when the true Sun arose upon him! Phil. iii. 7, 8. Your last letter is as a comment upon his determination. Adored be the grace that has given us to be like-minded, even to "account all things but loss "for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus "our Lord."

While I am writing, a new lustre, which gilds the house on the hill opposite to my study-window, informs me that the sun is now rising; he is rising to others, but not yet to me; my situation is lower, so that they enjoy a few gleams of sun-shine before me; yet this momentary difference is inconsiderable, when compared to the duration of a whole day. Thus some are called by grace earlier in life, and some later; but the seeming difference will be lost and vanish when the great day of eternity comes on. There is a time, the Lord's best appointed time, when he will arise and shine upon many a soul that now sits "in darkness, and in the region of "the shadow of death."

I have been thinking on the Lord's conference with Nicodemus; it is a copious subject, and affords room, in one part or other, for the whole round of doctrinal and experimental topics. Nicodemus is an encouraging example to those who are seeking the Lord's salvation: he had received some favourable impressions of Jesus; but he was very ignorant, and much under the fear of man. He durst only come by night, and at first, though he heard, he understood not; but He, who opens the eyes of the blind, brought him surely, though gently, forward. The next time we hear of him, he

durst put in a word in behalf of Christ, even in the midst of his enemies, John vii.; and at last, he had the courage openly and publicly to assist in preparing the body of his master for its funeral, at a time when our Lord's more avowed followers had all forsook him, and fled. So true is *that*, "Then shall ye know, if ye fol- "low on to know the Lord;" and again, "He giveth "power to the faint; and to them that have no might, "he increaseth strength."

Hope then, my soul, against hope; though thy graces are faint and languid, he who planted them will water his own work, and not suffer them wholly to die. He can make a little one as a thousand; at his presence mountains sink into plains, streams gush out of the flinty rock, and the wilderness blossoms as the rose. He can pull down what sin builds up, and build up what sin pulls down; that which was impossible to us, is easy to him, and he has bid us expect seasons of refreshment from his presence. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXVII.

On Union with Christ.

Dear Sir,

THE union of a believer with Christ is so intimate, so unalterable, so rich in privilege, so powerful in influence, that it cannot be fully represented by any description or similitude taken from earthly things. The mind, like the sight, is incapable of apprehending a great object, without viewing it on different sides. To help our weakness, the nature of this union is illustrated, in

the Scripture, by four comparisons, each throwing additional light on the subject, yet all falling short of the thing signified.

In our natural state, we are κλυδωνιζομενοι και περιφερομενοι, driven and tossed about by the changing winds of opinion, and the waves of trouble, which hourly disturb and threaten us upon the uncertain sea of human life. But faith, uniting us to Christ, fixes us upon a sure foundation, the Rock of Ages, where we stand immoveable, though storms and floods unite their force against us.

By nature we are separated from the divine life, as branches broken off, withered and fruitless. But grace, through faith, unites us to Christ, the living Vine, from whom, as the root of all fulness, a constant supply of sap and influence is derived into each of his mystical branches, enabling them to bring forth fruit unto God, and to persevere and abound therein.

By nature we are στυγητοι και μισουντες, hateful and abominable in the sight of a holy God, and full of enmity and hatred towards each other. By faith, uniting us to Christ, we have fellowship with the Father and the Son, and joint communion among ourselves; even as the members of the same body have each of them union, communion, and sympathy, with the head, and with their fellow-members.

In our natural estate, we were cast out naked and destitute, without pity, and without help, Ezek. xvi.; but faith, uniting us to Christ, interests us in his righteousness, his riches, and his honours. Our Redeemer is our husband; our debts are paid, our settlement secured, and our names changed.

Thus the Lord Jesus, in declaring himself the foundation, root, head, and husband of his people, takes in

all the ideas we can frame of an intimate, vital, and inseparable union. Yet all these fall short of truth; and he has given us one further similitude, of which we can by no means form a just conception, till we shall be brought to *see him as he is* in his kingdom, John xvii. 21. "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art "in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one "in us."

Well may we say, What hath God wrought! How inviolable is the security, how inestimable the privilege, how inexpressible the happiness of a believer! How greatly is he indebted to grace! He was once afar off, but he is brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ: he was once a child of wrath, but is now an heir of everlasting life. How strong then are his obligations to walk worthy of God, who has called him to his kingdom and glory!

I am, &c.

LETTER XXVIII.

Answer to the Question, In what manner are we to expect the Lord's promised Guidance to influence our Judgments, and direct our Steps in the Path of Duty?

Dear Sir,

IT is well for those who are duly sensible of their own weakness and fallibility, and of the difficulties with which they are surrounded in life, that the Lord has promised to guide his people with his eye, and to cause them to hear a word behind them, saying, "This is the "way, walk ye in it," when they are in danger of turning aside, either to the right hand or to the left. For

this purpose, he has given us the written word to be a lamp to our feet, and encouraged us to pray for the teaching of his Holy Spirit, that we may rightly understand and apply it. It is, however, too often seen, that many widely deviate from the path of duty, and commit gross and perplexing mistakes, while they profess a sincere desire to know the will of God, and think they have his warrant and authority. This must certainly be owing to misapplication of the rule by which they judge, since the rule itself is infallible, and the promise sure. The Scripture cannot deceive us, if rightly understood; but it may, if perverted, prove the occasion of confirming us in a mistake. The Holy Spirit cannot mislead those who are under his influence; but we may suppose that we are so, when we are not. It may not be unseasonable to offer a few thoughts upon a subject of great importance to the peace of our minds, and to the honour of our holy profession.

Many have been deceived as to what they ought to do, or in forming a judgment beforehand of events in which they are nearly concerned, by expecting direction in ways which the Lord has not warranted. I shall mention some of the principal of these, for it is not easy to enumerate them all.

Some persons, when two or more things have been in view, and they could not immediately determine which to prefer; have committed their case to the Lord by prayer, and have then proceeded to cast lots: taking it for granted, that after such a solemn appeal, the turning up of the lot might be safely rested in as an answer from God. It is true, the Scripture, and indeed right reason, assures us, that the Lord disposes the lot; and there are several cases recorded in the Old Testament, in which lots were used by divine appointment:

but I think neither these, nor the choosing Matthias by lot to the apostleship, are proper precedents for our conduct. In the division of the lands of Canaan, in the affair of Achan, and in the nomination of Saul to the kingdom, recourse was had to lots by God's express command. The instance of Matthias likewise was singular, such as can never happen again; namely, the choice of an apostle, who would not have been upon a par with the rest, who were chosen immediately by the Lord, unless *He* had been pleased to interpose in some extraordinary way; and all these were before the canon of Scripture was completed, and before the full descent and communication of the Holy Spirit, who was promised to dwell with the church to the end of time. Under the New Testament dispensation, we are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, to make our requests known to the Lord, and to cast our cares upon him: but we have neither precept nor promise respecting the use of lots; and to have recourse to them without his appointment, seems to be tempting him rather than honouring him, and to savour more of presumption than dependence. The effects likewise of this expedient have often been unhappy and hurtful: a sufficient proof how little it is to be trusted to as a guide of our conduct.

Others, when in doubt, have opened the Bible at a venture, and expected to find something to direct them in the first verse they should cast their eye upon. It is no small discredit to this practice, that the Heathens, who knew not the Bible, used some of their favourite books in the same way: and grounded their persuasions of what they ought to do, or of what should befall them, according to the passage they happened to open upon. Among the Romans, the writings of Virgil were frequently consulted upon these occasions; which gave rise

to the well-known expression of the *Sortes Virgilianæ.* And indeed Virgil is as well adapted to satisfy inquirers in this way, as the Bible itself; for if people will be governed by the occurrence of a single text of Scripture, without regarding the context, or duly comparing it with the general tenor of the word of God, and with their own circumstances, they may commit the greatest extravagances, expect the greatest impossibilities, and contradict the plainest dictates of common sense, while they think they have the word of God on their side. Can the opening upon 2 Sam. vii. 3. when Nathan said unto David, "Do all that is in thine heart, for the "Lord is with thee," be sufficient to determine the lawfulness or expediency of actions? Or can a glance of the eye upon our Lord's words to the woman of Canaan, Matth. xv. 28. "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt," amount to a proof, that the present earnest desire of the mind, (whatever it may be,) shall be surely accomplished? Yet it is certain that matters big with important consequences have been engaged in, and the most sanguine expectations formed, upon no better warrant than dipping, (as it is called,) upon a text of Scripture.

A sudden strong impression of a text, that seems to have some resemblance to the concern upon the mind, has been accepted by many as an infallible token that they were right, and that things would go just as they would have them: or, on the other hand, if the passage bore a threatening aspect, it has filled them with fears and disquietudes, which they have afterwards found were groundless and unnecessary. These impressions, being more out of their power than the former method, have been more generally regarded and trusted to, but have frequently proved no less delusive. It is allowed, that such impressions of a precept or a promise, as

humble, animate, or comfort the soul, by giving it a lively sense of the truth contained in the words, are both profitable and pleasant; and many of the Lord's people have been instructed and supported, (especially in a time of trouble,) by some seasonable word of grace applied and sealed by his Spirit with power to their hearts. But if impressions or impulses are received as a voice from heaven, directing to such particular actions as could not be proved to be duties without them, a person may be unwarily misled into great evils and gross delusions; and many have been so. There is no doubt but the enemy of our souls, if permitted, can furnish us with Scriptures in abundance in this way, and for these purposes.

Some persons judge of the nature and event of their designs, by the freedom which they find in prayer. They say they commit their ways to God, seek his direction, and are favoured with much enlargement of spirit; and therefore they cannot doubt but what they have in view is acceptable in the Lord's sight. I would not absolutely reject every plea of this kind, yet, without other corroborating evidence, I could not admit it in proof of what it is brought for. It is not *always* easy to determine when we have spiritual freedom in prayer. Self is deceitful; and when our hearts are much fixed and bent upon a thing, this may put words and earnestness into our mouths. Too often we first secretly determine for ourselves, and then come to ask counsel of God; in such a disposition we are ready to catch at every thing that may seem to favour our darling scheme; and the Lord, for the detection and chastisement of our hypocrisy, (for hypocrisy it is, though perhaps hardly perceptible to ourselves,) may answer us according to our idols; see Ezek. xiv. 3, 4. Besides, the grace of

prayer may be in exercise, when the subject-matter of the prayer may be founded upon a mistake, from the intervention of circumstances which we are unacquainted with. Thus I may have a friend in a distant country, I hope he is alive, I pray for him, and it is my duty so to do. The Lord, by his Spirit, assists his people in what is their present duty. If I am enabled to pray with much liberty for my distant friend, it may be a proof that the Spirit of the Lord is pleased to assist my infirmities, but it is no proof that my friend is certainly alive at the time I am praying for him; and if the next time I pray for him I should find my spirit straightened, I am not to conclude that my friend is dead, and therefore the Lord will not assist me in praying for him any longer.

Once more: A remarkable dream has sometimes been thought as decisive as any of the foregoing methods of knowing the will of God. That many wholesome and seasonable admonitions have been received in dreams, I willingly allow; but, though they may be occasionally noticed, to pay a great attention to dreams, especially to be guided by them, to form our sentiments, conduct, or expectations, upon them, is superstitious and dangerous. The promises are not made to those who dream, but to those who watch.

Upon the whole, though the Lord may give to some persons, upon some occasions, a hint or encouragement out of the common way; yet expressly to look for and seek his direction in such things as I have mentioned, is unscriptural and ensnaring. I could fill many sheets with a detail of the inconveniences and evils which have followed such a dependence, within the course of my own observation. I have seen some presuming they were doing God service, while acting in contradiction to

his express commands. I have known others infatuated to believe a lie, declaring themselves assured, beyond the shadow of a doubt, of things which, after all, never came to pass; and when at length disappointed, Satan has improved the occasion to make them doubt of the plainest and most important truths, and to account their whole former experience a delusion. By these things weak believers have been stumbled, cavils and offences against the Gospel multiplied, and the ways of truth evil spoken of.

But how then may the Lord's guidance be expected? After what has been premised negatively, the question may be answered in a few words. In general, he guides and directs his people, by affording them, in answer to prayer, the light of his Holy Spirit, which enables them to understand and to love the Scriptures. The word of God is not to be used as a lottery; nor is it designed to instruct us by shreds and scraps, which, detached from their proper places, have no determinate import; but it is to furnish us with just principles, right apprehensions to regulate our judgments and affections, and thereby to influence and direct our conduct. They who study the Scriptures, in an humble dependence upon divine teaching, are convinced of their own weakness, are taught to make a true estimate of every thing around them, are gradually formed into a spirit of submission to the will of God, discover the nature and duties of their several situations and relations in life, and the snares and temptations to which they are exposed. The word of God dwells richly in them, is a preservative from error, a light to their feet, and a spring of strength and consolation. By treasuring up the doctrines, precepts, promises, examples, and exhortations of Scripture, in their minds, and daily comparing themselves

with the rule by which they walk, they grow into an habitual frame of spiritual wisdom, and acquire a gracious taste, which enables them to judge of right and wrong with a degree of readiness and certainty, as a musical ear judges of sounds. And they are seldom mistaken, because they are influenced by the love of Christ, which rules in their hearts, and a regard to the glory of God, which is the great object they have in view.

In particular cases, the Lord opens and shuts for them, breaks down walls of difficulty which obstruct their path, or hedges up their way with thorns, when they are in danger of going wrong, by the dispensations of his providence. They know that their concernments are in his hands; they are willing to follow whither and when he leads; but are afraid of going before him. Therefore they are not impatient: because they believe, they will not make haste, but wait daily upon him in prayer; especially when they find their hearts most engaged in any purpose or pursuit, they are most jealous of being deceived by appearances, and dare not move further or faster than they can perceive his light shining upon their paths. I express at least their desire, if not their attainment: thus they would be. And though there are seasons when faith languishes, and self too much prevails, this is their general disposition; and the Lord, whom they serve, does not disappoint their expectations. He leads them by a right way, preserves them from a thousand snares, and satisfies them that he is and will be their guide even unto death.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXIX.

Thoughts on Rom. viii. 19, 20, 21.

Dear Sir,

THE apostle evidently introduces this passage in confirmation of what he had said before, ver. 17, 18. The privileges of the children of God are not only great, but sure. Every thing we see confirms our expectation of what God has promised. The whole frame of nature, in its present state of imperfection, strongly pleads for a future and better dispensation, as necessary to vindicate the wisdom, goodness, and justice of God; and this shall take place when the sons of God shall be manifested, and shall shine forth in the kingdom of their Father. It would be injurious to the honour of God to suppose, that things were at first created in the state they are now in, or that they will always continue so; and therefore the creature, which was originally designed to show forth the glory of God, is represented as burdened and groaning till those impediments are removed, which prevent it from fully answering its proper end.

Dr. Guyse's proposal of reading the 20th verse, (the words *in hope* excepted,) in a parenthesis, seems greatly to free the sense from embarrassment. Then the proposition in the 19th and 21st verses will be, "The "earnest expectation of the creature waiteth in hope, "for the manifestation of the sons of God, because *then* "the creature also shall be delivered from the bondage "of corruption," &c. The 20th verse expresses the creature's present state, "It is subject to vanity;" and

intimates the cause, " Not willingly," but by reason of him who hath subjected the same.

By *the creature* some understand mankind, as the word is used, Mark xvi. 15.; and it is certain, that, partly from imperfect tradition, and partly from a general rumour of the prophecies extant among the Jews, the Heathens had some confused apprehension of a deliverer from misery; agreeable to which, or rather on account of their need of a Saviour, whether they knew it or not, Christ is styled *the desire of all nations.* But this does not seem to be the sense; because the creature here is said to be subject to vanity, *not willingly,* and is represented as groaning, travailing, and longing, ver. 22, for deliverance. But it is so far from being the concurrent desire of all mankind, or indeed the desire of any single person, to obtain freedom from the bondage of sin, that we are naturally pleased with it, and yield a willing subjection. Besides, the period referred to is beyond the present life, and intends not a partial relief here, but a full deliverance hereafter. It seems, therefore, that *creature* in these verses, and *creation* in ver. 22, as they are both expressed by the same word in the Greek, are to be taken in the same sense. The whole frame of this lower world, which is now subject to vanity on account of the sin of many, is represented as longing and waiting for deliverance.

The word αποκαραδοκια, which we render *earnest expectation,* is very emphatical; it imports a raising up or thrusting forward the head, as persons who are in suspense for the return of a messenger, or the issue of some interesting event. Compare Judges v. 28. Luke xxi. 28. It occurs but once more in the New Testament, Phil. i. 20: where the apostle is describing, in one view,

the confidence of his hope, and the many conflicts and oppositions which were the daily exercise of his faith.

Now it is a frequent beauty in the Scripture-language, to apply human affections to the inanimate creation; and these expressions are to be taken in a figurative sense, as denoting the importance and evidence of what is said. See Gen. iv. 11. Isa. i. 2. Luke xix. 40. The "earnest "expectation of the creature," therefore, teaches us two things, the weight and burden of the evils under which the world groans, and the sure purpose of God to restore all things by Jesus Christ. There is a period approaching, when all that is new, rough, and crooked, shall be made plain and straight. The Lord has promised it; and therefore all his works are represented as expecting and waiting for it.

This shall be at the manifestation of the sons of God. They are now hidden, unknown, unnoticed, and misrepresented, for the most part. Their life is in many respects hidden from themselves, and their privileges altogether hidden from the world. But ere long they will be manifested, their God will openly acknowledge them; every cloud by which they are now obscured shall be removed, and they shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. They have now a *gracious liberty:* they are freed from condemnation, from the power of sin, from the law as a covenant of works, from the yoke of carnal ordinances, from the traditions and inventions of men, and from the spirit of bondage; yet they suffer much from indwelling sin, the temptations of Satan, and their situation in a wicked and ensnaring world. But they are animated with the hope of a *glorious liberty*, when every evil, imperfection, and abatement, shall cease; when they shall be put in the full

possession of a happiness answerable to the riches of divine love, and the efficacy of the blood and mediation of Jesus; and then the curse shall be fully removed from the creation; the Lord shall create all things new, and again pronounce all things *good*. When they are thus manifested, the creature's expectation shall be answered. It shall be restored to its honour and use. Under what circumstances, and to what particular purposes, this change will take place, we know not; but a change worthy of divine wisdom, though beyond the limits of our weak apprehensions, we are warranted from Scripture to expect. It is asserted in this passage; to which perhaps we may properly add 2 Pet. iii. 13. Rev. xxi. 1. It would be easy to indulge vain conjectures upon this subject; but it is more safe to restrain them, and to content ourselves with what is clearly revealed. The hour is coming when all difficulties shall be explained, when the mysterious plan of divine Providence shall be unfolded, vindicated, and completed; then it shall appear, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the head and restorer of the creation; and how fully in every sense he has repaired the ruin brought into the world by sin, and destroyed the works of the devil.

In the mean time the sons of God groan, waiting for the adoption; and the creation groans with them. At present it is subject to vanity. Its original design was, to fulfil the will, and to set forth the glory of God; but, by the sin of man, it is disappointed with respect to these ends; not absolutely, for still the heavens declare his glory, and the earth is full of his goodness; but, with regard to outward appearances, there is a great abatement in both these respects. We may instance a few particulars, in which the creature is abused and oppressed, contrary to the design of its creation.

The creature was intended to show forth the glory of God. But here it has been disappointed, and has groaned, being burdened in all ages. Vain man has always been disposed to serve and worship the creature more than the Creator. The whole world formerly, except the Jews, were sunk in idolatry, paying divine honours to the sun and moon, yea, to stocks and stones; and a great part of the earth is to this moment covered with the same darkness. When this is the case, the creature groans under vanity, being perverted directly contrary to its proper end. And there is another idolatry, if not so gross, yet in us more inexcusable, by which the generality of those who bear the name of Christians are no less alienated from the knowledge and love of the true God, than the Heathens themselves.

Again: The creatures, as the servants of God, are properly designed to promote the welfare of his children, 1 Cor. iii. 22. Job v. 23. This great end is indeed finally secured by the promise, That all shall work together for their good. But at present they are exposed to great sufferings: all things seem to come alike to all. This, on the Lord's part, is a wise and gracious appointment for the exercise of faith, the mortification of sin, and the advancement of sanctification. But still in itself it is a vanity, under which the creation groans. When Jesus was crucified in *person*, the sun withdrew his light, rocks rent, and the earth quaked. There is a proportionable constraint upon nature when he suffers in his *members*. Sometimes this part of the vanity has been suspended, as in the case of Daniel and his companions; and, doubtless, the creatures would in general reverence the heirs of glory, were not the effects of sin upon them continued for wise reasons. They were

subject to man, when man was subject to his Maker. At present there is an apparent inconsistence, when beasts, and storms, and seas, rage against those whom their Creator is pleased to favour.

Once more: The creatures of God might be expected to engage in his behalf against his enemies. But it is subject to vanity here likewise. The earth is the Lord's; yet the chief parts and possessions of it are in the hands of those who hate him; yea, his enemies employ his creatures against his own friends. Surely, if the secret powerful restraint of his providence were taken off, it would be otherwise! How ready all the creatures are to fight in the Lord's cause, if he please to employ them, we may learn from the history of Egypt, in Exodus, from the death of Dathan and Abiram, and the destruction of Sennacherib's army. It is therefore a bondage introduced by sin, and under which they groan, that they are compelled to prolong the lives and serve the occasions of ungodly sinners.

The *effect* being manifest, that the creature is subject to vanity, the apostle briefly intimates the *cause:* "Not "willingly." The creature, considered in itself, is not in fault. All things were created good in the beginning, and in themselves are good still. Not the fault, but the perversion and subjection of the creature, are here complained of. A beauty, variety, and order in the works of God, are still discernible, sufficient to fill an attentive and enlightened mind with wonder, love, and praise; though it must be allowed, that sin has not only alienated our hearts, and disabled our faculties, so that we cannot rightly contemplate God in his works, but has likewise occasioned a considerable alteration in the visible state of things. One instance is expressly specified, Gen. iii. 16.

The positive cause is ascribed to *Him* who has subjected the same. These words may bear three different senses, in agreement with the current doctrine of the Scripture. The prime author of the mischief was Satan. Full of malice and enmity against God and his creatures, he attempted to bring evil into this lower world, and was permitted to succeed; the Lord purposing to over-rule it to his own glory. But for a season the work of the devil has been, to introduce and maintain a sad scene of vanity and misery. Our first father Adam was the direct and immediate cause of the entrance of sin and vanity into the creation. He was created upright, and all things good about him: but he listened to Satan, and sinned, and by his sin

Brought death into the world, and all our wo;

for *we* were concerned in his transgression, as he was our head both in nature and law. But we may refer the *Him* to God; and this seems best to suit the apostle's design here. God, the righteous judge, subjected the creature to vanity, as the just consequence and desert of man's disobedience. But he has subjected it *in hope;* with a reserve in favour of his own people, by which, though they are liable to trouble, they are secured from the penal desert of sin, and the vanity of the creature is by his wisdom over-ruled to wise and gracious purposes. The earth, and all in it, was made for the sake of man: for his sin it was first cursed, and afterwards destroyed by water; and sin at last shall set it on fire. But God, who is rich in mercy, appointed a people to himself out of the fallen race: for their sakes, and as a theatre whereon to display the wonders of his providence and grace, it was renewed after the

flood, and still continues; but not in its original state: there are marks of the evil of sin, and of God's displeasure against it, wherever we turn our eyes. This truth is witnessed to by every thing without us and within us. But there shall be a deliverance to those who fear him; and, by his word and Spirit, he teaches them to receive instruction and benefit, even from this root of bitterness. Even now they are the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what they will be when he shall appear, and be admired in all them that believe. Then they shall be manifested, and then the creature also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption.

How blind, then, are they who expect happiness from the creature, which is itself subject to vanity, and who are meanly content with the present state of things! It is because they are estranged from God, have no sense of his excellency, no regard for his glory, no knowledge of their own proper good! They are further removed from the desires they ought to have in their present circumstances, than the brute creation, or the very ground they walk on; for all things but man, have an instinct, or natural principle, to answer the end for which they were appointed. Fire and hail, wind and storm, fulfil the word of God, though we poor mortals dare to disobey it. But if the secret voice of the whole creation desires the consummation of all things, surely they who have the light of God's word and Spirit will look forward, and long for that glorious day. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

I am, &c.

LETTER XXX.

On the Right Use of the Law.

Dear Sir,

YOU desire my thoughts on 1 Tim. i. 8. "We know "the law is good, if a man use it lawfully," and I willingly comply. I do not mean to send you a sermon on the text; yet a little attention to method may not be improper upon this subject, though in a letter to a friend. Ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most religious mistakes. This is the root of self-righteousness, the grand reason why the Gospel of Christ is no more regarded, and the cause of that uncertainty and inconsistence in many, who, though they profess themselves teachers, understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. If we previously state what is meant by the law, and by what means we know the law to be good, I think it will, from these premises, be easy to conclude what it is to use the law *lawfully*.

The law, in many passages of the Old Testament, signifies the whole revelation of the will of God, as in Psalm i. 2. and xix. 7. But the law, in a strict sense, is contradistinguished from the Gospel. Thus the apostle considers it at large in his epistles to the Romans and Galatians. I think it evident, that, in the passage you have proposed, the apostle is speaking of the law of Moses. But, to have a clearer view of the subject, it may be proper to look back to a more early period.

The law of God, then, in the largest sense, is that rule, or prescribed course, which he has appointed for

his creatures according to their several natures and capacities, that they may answer the end for which he has created them Thus it comprehends the inanimate creation. The wind or storm fulfil his word or law. He hath appointed the moon for its seasons; and the sun knoweth its going down, or going forth, and performs all its revolutions according to its Maker's pleasure. If we could suppose the sun was an intelligent being, and should refuse to shine, or should wander from the station in which God had placed it, it would then be a transgressor of the law. But there is no such disorder in the natural world. The law of God in this sense, or what many choose to call the law of nature, is no other than the impression of God's power, whereby all things continue and act according to his will from the beginning: for "he spake, and it was done; he commanded, "and it stood fast."

The animals destitute of reason are likewise under a law; that is, God has given them instincts according to their several kinds, for their support and preservation, to which they invariably conform. A wisdom unspeakably superior to all the contrivance of man disposes their concernments, and is visible in the structure of a bird's nest, or the economy of a bee-hive. But this wisdom is restrained within narrow limits; they act without any remote design, and are incapable either of good or evil in a moral sense.

When God created man, he taught him more than the beasts of the earth, and made him wiser than the fowls of heaven. He formed him for himself, breathed into him a spirit immortal and incapable of dissolution, gave him a capacity not to be satisfied with any creature-good, endued him with an understanding, will, and affections, which qualified him for the knowledge and ser-

vice of his Maker, and a life of communion with him. The law of God, therefore, concerning man, is that rule of disposition and conduct to which a creature so constituted ought to conform; so that the end of his creation might be answered, and the wisdom of God be manifested in him and by him. Man's continuance in this regular and happy state was not necessary as it is in the creatures, who, having no rational faculties, have properly no choice, but act under the immediate agency of divine power. As man was capable of continuing in the state in which he was created, so he was capable of forsaking it. He did so, and sinned by eating the forbidden fruit. We are not to suppose that this prohibition was the whole of the law of Adam, so that if he had abstained from the tree of knowledge, he might in other respects have done, (as we say,) what he pleased. This injunction was the test of his obedience; and while he regarded it, he could have no desire contrary to holiness, because his nature was holy. But when he broke through it, he broke through the whole law, and stood guilty of idolatry, blasphemy, rebellion, and murder. The divine light in his soul was extinguished, the image of God defaced; he became like Satan, whom he had obeyed, and lost his power to keep that law which was connected with his happiness. Yet still the law remained in force: the blessed God could not lose his right to that reverence, love, and obedience, which must always be due to him from his intelligent creatures. Thus Adam became a transgressor, and incurred the penalty, death. But God, who is rich in mercy, according to his eternal purpose revealed the promise of the seed of the woman, and instituted sacrifices as types of that atonement for sin, which *He*, in the fulness of time, should accomplish by the sacrifice of himself.

Adam, after his fall, was no longer a public person; he was saved by grace, through faith: but the depravity he had brought upon human nature remained. His children, and so all his posterity, were born in his sinful likeness, without either ability or inclination to keep the law. The earth was soon filled with violence. But a few in every successive age were preserved by grace, and faith in the promise. Abraham was favoured with a more full and distinct revelation of the covenant of grace; he saw the day of Christ, and rejoiced. In the time of Moses, God was pleased to set apart a peculiar people to himself, and to them he published his law with great solemnity at Sinai: this law consisted of two distinct parts, very different in their scope and design, though both enjoined by the same authority.

The decalogue, or ten commands, uttered by the voice of God himself, is an abstract of that original law under which man was created; but published in a prohibitory form—the Israelites, like the rest of mankind, being depraved by sin, and strongly inclined to the commission of every evil. This law could not be designed as a covenant, by obedience to which man should be justified; for long before its publication the Gospel had been preached to Abraham, Gal. iii. 8. But the law entered that sin might abound; that the extent, the evil, and the desert of sin might be known; for it reaches to the most hidden thoughts of the heart, requires absolute and perpetual obedience, and denounces a curse upon all who continue not therein.

To this was superadded the ceremonial or Levitical law, prescribing a variety of institutions, purifications, and sacrifices; the observance of which were, during that dispensation, absolutely necessary to the accepta-

ble worship of God. By obedience to these prescriptions, the people of Israel preserved their legal right to the blessings promised to them as a nation, and which were not confined to spiritual worshippers only: and they were likewise ordinances and helps to lead those who truly feared God, and had conscience of sin, to look forward by faith to the great sacrifice, the Lamb of God, who in the fulness of time was to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. In both these respects the ceremonial law was abrogated by the death of Christ. The Jews then ceased to be God's peculiar people; and Jesus having expiated sin, and brought in an everlasting righteousness by his obedience unto death, all other sacrifices became unnecessary and vain. The Gospel supplies the place of the ceremonial law to the same advantage as the sun abundantly compensates for the twinkling of the stars, and the feeble glimmering of moonlight, which are concealed by its glory. Believers of old were relieved from the strictness of the moral law by the sacrifices which pointed to Christ. Believers under the Gospel are relieved by a direct application of the blood of the covenant. Both renounce any dependence on the moral law for justification, and both accept it as a rule of life in the hands of the Mediator, and are enabled to yield it a sincere, though not perfect, obedience.

If an Israelite, trusting to his obedience to the moral law, had ventured to reject the ordinances of the ceremonial, he would have been cut off. In like manner, if any who are called Christians are so well satisfied with their moral duties, that they see no necessity of making Christ their only hope, the law by which they seek life will be to them a ministration unto death.

Christ, and he alone, delivers us, by faith in his name, from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us.

A second inquiry is, How we came to know the law to be good? For naturally we do not, we cannot think so. We cannot be at enmity with God, and at the same time approve of his law; rather this is the ground of our dislike to him, that we conceive the law by which we are to be judged is too strict in its precepts, and too severe in its threatenings; and therefore men, so far as in them lies, are for altering this law. They think it would be better if it required no more than we can perform, if it allowed us more liberty, and especially if it was not armed against transgressors with the penalty of everlasting punishment. This is evident from the usual pleas of unawakened sinners; some think, "I am not "so bad as some others;" by which they mean, God will surely make a difference, and take favourable notice of what they suppose good in themselves. Others plead, "If *I* should not obtain mercy, what will be- "come of the greatest part of mankind?" by which they plainly intimate, that it would be hard and unjust in God, to punish such multitudes. Others endeavour to extenuate their sins, as Jonathan once said, I did but taste a little honey, and I must die. "These pas- "sions are natural to me, and must I die for indulging "them?" In short, the spirituality and strictness of the law, its severity, and its levelling effect, confounding all seeming differences in human characters, and stopping every mouth without distinction, are three properties of the law, which the natural man cannot allow to be good.

These prejudices against the law can only be removed by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is his office to en-

lighten and convince the conscience; to communicate an impression of the majesty, holiness, justice, and authority of the God with whom we have to do, whereby the evil and desert of sin is apprehended: the sinner is then stripped of all his vain pretences; is compelled to plead guilty, and must justify his judge, even though he should condemn him. It is *his* office likewise to discover the grace and glory of the Saviour, as having fulfilled the law for us, and as engaged by promise to enable those who believe in him to honour it with a due obedience in their own persons. Then a change of judgment takes place, and the sinner consents to the law, that it is holy, just, and good. Then the law is acknowledged to be holy: it manifests the holiness of God; and a conformity to it is the perfection of human nature. There can be no excellence in man, but so far as he is influenced by God's law: without it, the greater his natural powers and abilities are, he is but so much the more detestable and mischievous. It is assented to as just, springing from his indubitable right and authority over his creatures, and suited to their dependence upon him, and the abilities with which he originally endowed them. And though we by sin have lost those abilities, his right remains unalienable; and therefore he can justly punish transgressors. And as it is just in respect to God, so it is good for man; his obedience to the law, and the favour of God therein, being his proper happiness, and it is impossible for him to be happy in any other way. Only, as I have hinted, to sinners these things must be applied according to the Gospel, and to their new relation by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has obeyed the law, and made atonement for sin on their behalf; so that through him they are delivered from condemnation, and entitled to all the

benefits of his obedience: from him likewise they receive the law, as a rule enforced by his own example, and their unspeakable obligations to his redeeming love. This makes obedience pleasing, and the strength they derive from him makes it easy.

We may now proceed to inquire, in the last place, What it is to use the law lawfully? The expression implies, that it may be used unlawfully; and it is so by too many. It is not a lawful use of the law to seek justification and acceptance with God by our obedience to it; because it is not appointed for this end, or capable of answering it in our circumstances. The very attempt is a daring impeachment of the wisdom and goodness of God; for if righteousness could come by the law, then Christ has died in vain; Gal. ii. 21. iii. 21.; so that such a hope is not only groundless, but sinful; and, when persisted in under the light of the Gospel, is no less than a wilful rejection of the grace of God. Again, It is an unlawful use of the law, that is, an abuse of it, an abuse both of law and Gospel, to pretend, that its accomplishment by Christ releases believers from any obligation to it as a rule. Such an assertion is not only wicked, but absurd and impossible in the highest degree: for the law is founded in the relation between the Creator and the creature, and must unavoidably remain in force so long as that relation subsists. While he is God, and we are creatures, in every possible or supposable change of state or circumstances, he must have an unrivalled claim to our reverence, love, trust, service, and submission. No true believer can deliberately admit a thought or a wish of being released from his obligation of obedience to God in whole or in part; he will rather start from it with abhorrence. But Satan labours to drive unstable souls

from one extreme to the other, and has too often succeeded. Wearied with vain endeavours to keep the law, that they might obtain life by it, and afterwards taking up with a notion of the Gospel devoid of power, they have at length despised that obedience which is the honour of a Christain, and essentially belongs to his character, and have abused the grace of God to licentiousness. But we have not so learned Christ.

To speak affirmatively, The law is lawfully used as a means of conviction of sin: for this purpose it was promulgated at Sinai. The law entered, that sin might abound: not to make men more wicked, though occasionally and by abuse it has that effect, but to make them sensible how wicked they are. Having God's law in our hands, we are no longer to form our judgments by the maxims and customs of the world, where evil is called good, and good evil; but are to try every principle, temper, and practice, by this standard. Could men be prevailed upon to do this, they would soon listen to the Gospel with attention. On some the Spirit of God does thus prevail: then they earnestly make the jailer's inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" Here the work of grace begins; and the sinner, condemned in his own conscience, is brought to Jesus for life.

Again: When we use the law as a glass to behold the glory of God, we use it lawfully. His glory is eminently revealed in Christ; but much of it is with a special reference to the law, and cannot be otherwise discerned. We see the perfection and excellence of the law in his life. God was glorified by his obedience as a man. What a perfect character did he exhibit! yet it is no other than a transcript of the law. Such would have been the character of Adam and all his race, had the law been duly obeyed. It appears, there-

fore, a wise and holy institution, fully capable of displaying that perfection of conduct by which man would have answered the end of his creation. And we see the inviolable strictness of the law in his death. There the glory of God in the law is manifested. Though he was the beloved Son, and had yielded personal obedience in the utmost perfection, yet, when he stood in our place to make atonement for sin, he was not spared. From what he endured in Gethsemane and upon the cross, we learn the meaning of that awful sentence, "The soul that sinneth shall die."

Another lawful use of the law is, to consult it as a rule and pattern by which to regulate our spirit and conversation. The grace of God, received by faith, will dispose us to obedience in general; but through remaining darkness and ignorance we are much at a loss as to particulars. We are therefore sent to the law, that we may learn how to walk worthy of God, who has called us to his kingdom and glory; and every precept has its proper place and use.

Lastly: We use the law lawfully when we improve it as a test whereby to judge of the exercise of grace. Believers differ so much from what they once were, and from what many still are, that without this right use of the law, comparing themselves with their former selves, or with others, they would be prone to think more highly of their attainments than they ought. But when they recur to this standard, they sink into the dust, and adopt the language of Job, "Behold, I am vile; I cannot answer thee one of a thousand."

From hence we may collect in brief, how the law is good to them that use it lawfully. It furnishes them with a comprehensive and accurate view of the will of God, and the path of duty. By the study of the

law, they acquire an habitual spiritual taste of what is right or wrong. The exercised believer, like a skilful workman, has a rule in his hand, whereby he can measure and determine with certainty; whereas others judge as it were by the eye, and can only make a random guess, in which they are generally mistaken. It likewise, by reminding them of their deficiencies and short-comings, is a sanctified means of making and keeping them humble; and it exceedingly endears Jesus, the law-fulfiller, to their hearts, and puts them in mind of their obligations to him, and of their absolute dependence upon him every moment.

If these reflections should prove acceptable to you, I have my desire; and I send them to you by the press, in hopes that the Lord may accompany them with his blessing to others. The subject is of great importance, and, were it rightly understood, might conduce to settle some of the angry controversies which have been lately agitated. Clearly to understand the distinction, connexion, and harmony, between the law and the Gospel, and their mutual subserviency to illustrate and establish each other, is a singular privilege, and a happy means of preserving the soul from being entangled by errors on the right hand or the left.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXI.

Of Love to the Brethren.

Dear Sir,

THE apostle having said, "Marvel not, my brethren, "if the world hate you," immediately subjoins, "We

" know that we have passed from death unto life, be-
" cause we love the brethren." By the manner of his expression, he sufficiently intimates, that the want of this love is so universal, till the Lord plants it in the heart, that if we possess it, we may thereby be sure he has given us of his Spirit, and delivered us from condemnation. But as the heart is deceitful, and people may be awfully mistaken in the judgment they form of themselves, we have need to be very sure that we rightly understand what it is to love the brethren, before we draw the apostle's conclusion from it, and admit it as an evidence of our own favour, that we have passed from death unto life. Let me invite you, reader, to attend with me a little to this subject.

There are some counterfeits of this love to the brethren, which it is to be feared have often been mistaken for it, and have led people to think themselves something, when indeed they were nothing. For instance:

There is a *natural* love of the brethren. People may sincerely love their relations, friends, and benefactors, who are of the brethren, and yet be utter strangers to the spiritual love the apostle speaks of. So Orpah had a great affection for Naomi, though it was not strong enough to make her willing with Ruth to leave her native country, and her idol-gods. Natural affection can go no further than to a personal attachment; and they who thus love the brethren, and upon no better ground, are often disgusted with those things in them, for which the real brethren chiefly love one another.

There is likewise a *love of convenience.* The Lord's people are gentle, peaceful, benevolent, swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. They are desirous of adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour, and approving themselves followers of him who pleased not

himself, but spent his life in doing good to others. Upon this account, they who are full of themselves, and love to have their own way, may like their company, because they find more compliances, and less opposition from them, than from such as themselves. For a while Laban loved Jacob; he found him diligent and trust-worthy, and perceived that the Lord had prospered him upon Jacob's account; but when he saw that Jacob flourished, and apprehended he was likely to do without him, his love was soon at an end; for it was only founded in self-interest.

A *party-love* is also common. The objects of this are those who are of the same sentiment, worship in the same way, or are attached to the same minister. They who are united in such narrow and separate associations, may express warm affections, without giving any proof of true Christian love; for upon such grounds as these, not only professed Christians, but Jews and Turks, may be said to love one another: though it must be allowed that believers being renewed but in part, the love which they bear to the brethren, is too often debased and allayed by a mixture of selfish affections.

The principle of true love to the brethren, is the LOVE OF GOD, that love which produceth obedience, 1 John v. 2. "By this we know that we love the chil-"dren of God, if we love God, and keep his command-"ments." When people are free to form their connexions and friendships, the ground of their communion is in a sameness of inclination. The love spoken of is spiritual. The children of God, who therefore stand in the relation of brethren to each other, though they have too many unhappy differences in points of smaller importance, agree in the supreme love they bear to their heavenly Father, and to Jesus their Saviour; of course

they agree in disliking and avoiding sin, which is contrary to the will and command of the God whom they love and worship. Upon these accounts they love one another, they are like-minded; and they live in a world where the bulk of mankind are against them, have no regard to their Beloved, and live in the sinful practices which his grace has taught them to hate. Their situation, therefore, increases their affection to each other. They are washed by the same blood, supplied by the same grace, opposed by the same enemies, and have the same heaven in view: therefore they love one another with a pure heart fervently.

The properties of this love, where its exercise is not greatly impeded by ignorance and bigotry, are such as prove its heavenly original. It extends to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; cannot be confined within the pale of a denomination, nor restrained to those with whom it is more immediately connected. It is gentle, and not easily provoked; hopes the best, makes allowances for infirmities, and is easily entreated. It is kind and compassionate; and this not in words only, but sympathizes with the afflicted, and relieves the indigent, according to its ability; and as it primarily respects the image of Christ in its objects, it feels a more peculiar attachment to those whom it judges to be the most spiritual, though without undervaluing or despising the weakest attainments in the true grace of the Gospel.

They are happy who thus love the brethren. They have passed from death unto life; and may plead this gracious disposition, though not before the Lord as the ground of their hope, yet against Satan, when he would tempt them to question their right to the promises. But, alas! as I before hinted, the exercise of this love, when it really is implanted, is greatly obstructed through the

remaining depravity which cleaves to believers. We cannot be too watchful against those tempers which weaken the proper effects of brotherly love, and thereby have a tendency to darken the evidence of our having passed from death unto life. We live in a day when the love of many, (of whom we would hope the best,) is at least grown very cold. The effects of a narrow, a suspicious, a censorious, and a selfish spirit, are but too evident amongst professors of the Gospel. If I were to insist at large upon the offences of this kind which abound amongst us, I should seem almost reduced to the necessity, either of retracting what I have advanced, or of maintaining that a great part, (if not the greatest part,) of those who profess to know the Lord, are deceiving themselves with a form of godliness, destitute of the power: for though they may abound in knowledge and gifts, and have much to say upon the subject of Christian experience, they appear to want the great, the inimitable, the indispensable criterion of true Christianity, a love to the brethren; without which, all other seeming advantages and attainments are of no avail. How is this disagreeable dilemma to be avoided?

I believe they who are most under the influence of divine love, will join with me in lamenting their deficiency. It is well that we are not under the law, but under grace; for on whatever point we try ourselves by the standard of the sanctuary, we shall find reason to say, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O "Lord." There is an amazing and humbling difference between the conviction we have of the beauty and excellence of divine truths, and our actual experience of their power ruling in our hearts. In our happiest hours, when we are most affected with the love of Jesus, we feel our love fervent towards his people. We wish it

were always so; but we are poor inconsistent creatures, and find we can do nothing as we ought, but as we are enabled by his grace. But we trust we do not allow ourselves in what is wrong; and, notwithstanding we may in particular instances be misled by ignorance and prejudice, we do in our hearts love the brethren, account them the excellent of the earth, and desire to have our lot and portion with them in time and in eternity. We know that the love we bear them is for his sake; and when we consider his interest in *them*, and our obligations to *him*, we are ashamed and grieved that we love them no better.

If we could not conscientiously say thus much, we should have just reason to question our sincerity, and the safety of our state; for the Scriptures cannot be broken, nor can the grace of God fail of producing in some degree its proper fruits. Our Saviour, before whom we must shortly appear as our judge, has made love the characteristic of his disciples; and without some evidence that this is the prevailing disposition of our hearts, we could find little comfort in calling him God. Let not this be accounted legality, as if our dependence was upon something in ourselves. The question is not concerning the method of acceptance with God, but concerning the fruits or tokens of an accepted state. The most eminent of these, by our Lord's express declaration, is brotherly love. "By this shall all "men know that you are my disciples, if you love one "another." No words can be plainer; and the consequence is equally plain, however hard it may bear upon any professors, that though they could speak with the tongues of angels, had the knowledge of all mysteries, a power of working miracles, and a zeal prompting them to give their bodies to be burned in defence of the truth;

yet if they love not the brethren, they are but as sounding brass or tinkling cymbals: they may make a great noise in the church and in the world; they may be wise and able men, as the words are now frequently understood; they may pray or preach with great fluency; but in the sight of God their faith is dead, and their religion is vain.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXII.

On Candour.

Dear Sir,

I AM with you an admirer of candour; but let us beware of counterfeits. True candour is a Christian grace, and will grow in no soil but a believing heart. It is an eminent and amiable property of that love which beareth, believeth, hopeth, and endureth all things. It forms the most favourable judgment of persons and characters, and puts the kindest construction upon the conduct of others that it possibly can, consistent with the love of truth. It makes due allowances for the infirmities of human nature; will not listen with pleasure to what is said to the disadvantage of any, nor repeat it without a justifiable cause. It will not be confined within the walls of a party, nor restrain the actings of benevolence to those whom it fully approves; but prompts the mind to an imitation of him who is kind to the unthankful and the evil, and has taught us to consider every person we see as our neighbour.

Such is the candour which I wish to derive from the Gospel; and I am persuaded they who have imbibed

most of this spirit, will acknowledge that they are still defective in it. There is an unhappy propensity, even in good men, to a selfish, narrow, censorious turn of mind; and the *best* are more under the power of prejudice than they are aware. A want of candour among the professors of the same Gospel, is too visible in the present day. A truly candid person will acknowledge what is right and excellent in those from whom he may be obliged to differ: he will not charge the faults or extravagances of a few upon a whole party or denomination: if he thinks it his duty to point out or refute the errors of any persons, he will not impute to them such consequences of their tenets as they expressly disavow; he will not wilfully misrepresent or aggravate their mistakes, or make them offenders for a word: he will keep in view the distinction between those things which are fundamental and essential to the Christian life, and those concerning which a difference of sentiment may and often has obtained among true believers. Were there more candour among those who profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, the emotions of anger or scorn would not be so often felt or excited, by pronouncing or hearing the words *Churchman*, or *Dissenter*, or *Calvinist*, or even *Arminian*. Let us, my friend, be candid: let us remember how totally ignorant we ourselves once were; how often we have changed our sentiments in one particular or other, since we first engaged in the search of truth; how often we have been imposed upon by appearances; and to how many different persons and occurrences we have been indebted, under God, for the knowledge which we have already attained. Let us likewise consider what treatment we like to meet with from others; and do unto them as we would they should do unto us. These consi-

derations will make the exercise of candour habitual and easy.

But there is a candour, falsely so called, which springs from an indifference to the truth, and is governed by the fear of men and the love of praise. This pretended candour depreciates the most important doctrines of the Gospel, and treats them as points of speculation and opinion. It is a temporizing expedient to stand fair with the world, and to avoid that odium which is the unavoidable consequence of a steadfast, open, and hearty adherence to the truth as it is in Jesus. It aims to establish an intercommunity between light and darkness, Christ and Belial; and, under a pretence of avoiding harsh and uncharitable judgments, it introduces a mutual connivance in principles and practices which are already expressly condemned by clear decisions of Scripture. Let us not listen to the advocates for a candour of this sort; such a lukewarm temper, in those who would be thought friends of the Gospel, is treason against God, and treachery to the souls of men. It is observable, that they who boast most of this candour, and pretend to the most enlarged and liberal way of thinking, are generally agreed to exclude from their comprehension all whom they call bigots; that is, in other words, those who, having been led by divine grace to build their hopes upon the foundation which God has laid in Zion, are free to declare their conviction, that other foundation can no man lay; and who, having seen that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, dare no longer conform to its leading maxims or customs, nor express a favourable judgment of the state or conduct of those who do. Candour itself knows not how to be candid to these; their singularity and importunity are offensive; and it is thought no way inconsist-

ent with the specious boast of benevolence and moderation to oppose, hate, and revile them. A sufficient proof, that the candour which many plead for, is only a softer name for that spirit of the world which opposes itself to the truth and obedience of the Gospel.

If a person be an avowed Socinian or Deist, I am still to treat him with candour; he has a right from me, so far as he comes in my way, to all the kind offices of humanity. I am not to hate, reproach, or affront him; or to detract from what may be valuable in his character, considered as a member of society. I may avail myself of his talents and abilities in points where I am not in danger of being misled by him. He may be a good lawyer, or historian, or physician; and I am not to lessen him in these respects, because I cannot commend him as a divine. I am bound to pity his errors, and to pray if peradventure God will give him repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth; and if I have a call to converse with him, I should speak with all gentleness and meekness, remembering that grace alone has made me to differ. But I am not to compliment him, to insinuate, or even to admit that there can be any safety in his principles. Far be that candour from us which represents the Scripture as a nose of wax, so that a person may reject or elude the testimonies there given to the Deity and atonement of Christ, and the all-powerful agency of the Holy Spirit, with impunity.

On the other hand, they who hold the Head, who have received the record which God hath given of his Son; who have Scriptural views of sin and grace, and fix their hopes for time and eternity upon the Saviour; in a word, all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;—these, I apprehend, if they are prevented from receiving, acknowledging, and loving each other, as he has re-

ceived, owned, and loved them, are justly chargeable with a want of candour. Shall I be cold to those whom Jesus loves? Shall I refuse them whom he has accepted? I find perhaps that they cannot rightly understand, and therefore cannot readily embrace some points of doctrine in which the Lord has been pleased to enlighten me; that is, I, (supposing my knowledge to be real and experimental,) have received five talents, and they have as yet obtained but two; must I for this estrange myself from them? Rather let me be careful lest they be found more faithful and exemplary in the improvement of two talents, than I am in the management of five. Again, why should some of those who know, or might know, that my hope, my way, my end, and my enemies, are the same with theirs, stand aloof from me, and treat me with coldness and suspicion, because I am called a Calvinist? I was not born a Calvinist, and possibly they may not die as they are; however that may be, if our hearts are fixed upon the same Jesus, we shall be perfectly of one mind ere long, why should we not encourage and strengthen one another now? O that the arm of the Lord might be revealed, to revive that candour which the apostle so strongly enforces both by precept and example! Then the strong would bear the infirmities of the weak, and believers would receive each other without doubtful disputation.

Once more: However *sound* and *orthodox*, (as the phrase is,) professors may be in their principles, though true candour will make tender allowances for the frailty of nature, and the power of temptation, yet neither candour nor charity will require us to accept them as real believers, unless the general strain and tenor of their deportment be as becometh the Gospel of Christ. It is to be lamented that too many judge rather by the

notions which people express, than by the fruits which they produce; and as they judge of others, so they often judge of themselves. We cannot have opportunity to say all we could wish, and to all whom we would wish to say it, upon this subject, in private life. Therefore it is the wisdom and duty of those who preach, and of those who print, to drop a word of caution in the way of their hearers and readers, that they may not mistake notion for life, nor a form of godliness for the power. The grace of God is an operative principle; and where it really has place in the heart, the effects will be seen; Acts xi. 23.: effects so uniform and extensive, that the apostle James makes one single branch of conduct, and that such a one as is not usually thought the most important, a sufficient test of our state before God; for he affirms universally, that "if any man seem to be re-"ligious, and bridleth not his tongue, his religion is "vain." And again he assures us, that "whoever will "be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." And to the same purpose Paul expresses himself on the subject of love, (that love which he describes so accurately, that none can mistake it, unless they willingly deceive themselves.) He declares, that, without this love, the brightest knowledge, the warmest zeal, and the most splendid gifts, are nothing worth. It is to be feared these decisions will bear hard upon many who have a name to live among the churches of Christ. They are hearers and approvers of the Gospel, express a regard to those who preach it; they will stickle and fight for the doctrines, and know not how to bear those who fall a hair's breadth short of their standard; and yet there is so much levity or pride, censoriousness or worldliness, discoverable in their general behaviour, that their characters appear very dubious; and though we are bound

to wish them well, candour will not oblige or warrant us to judge favourably of such conduct; for the unerring word of God is the standard to which our judgments are to be referred and conformed

In the sense and under the limitations which I have expressed, we ought to cultivate a candid spirit, and learn from the experience of our own weakness, to be gentle and tender to others; avoiding at the same time that indifference and cowardice, which, under the name of candour, countenances error, extenuates sin, and derogates from the authority of Scripture.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXIII.

(1) *On Man in his Fallen Estate.*

Lord, what is Man!

Dear Sir,

WE hear much in the present day of the dignity of human nature. And it is allowed that man was an excellent creature as he came out of the hands of God; but if we consider this question with a view to fallen man, as depraved by sin, how can we but join with the Psalmist in wonder that the great God should make any account of him?

Fallen as man is from his original state of happiness and holiness, his natural faculties and abilities afford sufficient evidence, that the hand which made him is divine. He is capable of great things. His understanding, will, affections, imagination, and memory, are noble and amazing powers. But view him in a moral light, as an intelligent being, incessantly dependent upon

God, accountable to him, and appointed by him to a state of existence in an unchangeable world; considered in this relation, man is a monster, a vile, base, stupid, obstinate, and mischievous creature; no words can fully describe him. Man, with all his boasted understanding and attainments, is a fool: so long as he is destitute of the saving grace of God, his conduct, as to his most important concernments, is more absurd and inconsistent than that of the meanest idiot; with respect to his affections and pursuits, he is degraded far below the beasts; and for the malignity and wickedness of his will, can be compared to nothing so properly as to the devil.

The question here is not concerning this or that man, a Nero or a Heliogabalus, but concerning human nature, the whole race of mankind, the few excepted who are born of God. There is indeed a difference amongst men, but it is owing to the restraints of Divine Providence, without which earth would be the very image of hell. A wolf or a lion, while chained, cannot do so much mischief as if they were loose; but the nature is the same in the whole species. Education and interest, fear and shame, human laws, and the secret power of God over the mind, combine to form many characters that are externally decent and respectable; and even the most abandoned are under a restraint which prevents them from manifesting a thousandth part of the wickedness which is in their hearts. But the heart itself is universally deceitful, and desperately wicked.

Man is a fool. He can indeed measure the earth, and almost count the stars; he abounds in arts and inventions, in science and policy—and shall he then be called a fool? The ancient Heathens, the inhabitants of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, were eminent for this kind of wisdom. They are to this day studied as models by

those who aim to excel in history, poetry, painting, architecture, and other exertions of human genius, which are suited to polish the manners, without improving the heart. But their most admired philosophers, legislators, logicians, orators, and artists, were as destitute as infants or idiots of that knowledge which alone deserves the name of true wisdom. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. Ignorant and regardless of God, yet conscious of their weakness, and of their dependence upon a power above their own, and stimulated by an inward principle of fear, of which they knew neither the origin nor right application, they worshipped the creature instead of the Creator, yea, placed their trust in stocks and stones, in the works of men's hands, in non-entities and chimeras. An acquaintance with their mythology, or system of religious fables, passes with us for a considerable branch of learning, because it is drawn from ancient books written in languages not known to the vulgar; but in point of certainty or truth, we might receive as much satisfaction from a collection of dreams, or from the ravings of lunatics. If, therefore, we admit these admired sages as a tolerable specimen of mankind, must we not confess, that man in his best estate, while uninstructed by the Spirit of God, is a fool? But are we wiser than they? Not in the least, till the grace of God makes us so. Our superior advantages only show our folly in a more striking light. Why do we account any persons foolish? A fool has no sound judgment; he is governed wholly by appearances, and would prefer a fine coat to the writings of a large estate. He pays no regard to consequences. Fools have sometimes hurt or killed their best friends, and thought they did no harm. A fool cannot reason, therefore arguments are lost upon him.

At one time, if tied with a straw, he dares not stir; at another time, perhaps, he can hardly be persuaded to move, though the house were on fire. Are these the characteristics of a fool? Then there is no fool like the sinner, who prefers the toys of earth to the happiness of heaven; who is held in bondage by the foolish customs of the world, and is more afraid of the breath of man, than of the wrath of God.

Again: Man in his natural state is a beast, yea, below the beasts that perish. In two things he strongly resembles them; in looking no higher than to sensual gratifications, and in that selfishness of spirit which prompts him to propose himself and his own interest as his proper and highest end. But in many respects he sinks sadly beneath them. Unnatural lusts, and the want of natural affection towards their offspring, are abominations not to be found among the brute creation. What shall we say of mothers destroying their children with their own hands, or of the horrid act of self-murder! Men are worse than beasts likewise in their obstinacy; they will not be warned. If a beast escapes from a trap, he will be cautious how he goes near it again, and in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird. But man, though he be often reproved, hardens his neck; he rushes upon his ruin with his eyes open, and can defy God to his face, and dare damnation.

Once more: Let us observe how man resembles the devil. There are spiritual sins, and from these in their height the Scripture teaches us to judge of Satan's character. Every feature in this description is strong in man; so that what our Lord said to the Jews is of general application, "Ye are of your father the devil, and "the lusts of your father you will do." Man resembles Satan in *pride;* this stupid, wicked creature values him-

self upon his wisdom, power, and virtue, and will talk of being saved by his good works; though if *he* can, Satan himself need not despair. He resembles him in *malice;* and this diabolical disposition often proceeds to murder, and would daily if the Lord did not restrain it. He derives from Satan the hateful spirit of *envy:* he is often tormented beyond expression, by beholding the prosperity of his neighbours; and proportionably pleased with their calamities, though he gains no other advantage from them than the gratification of this rancorous principle. He bears the image likewise of Satan in his *cruelty.* This evil is bound up in the heart even of a child. A disposition to take pleasure in giving pain to others, appears very early. Children, if left to themselves, soon feel a gratification in torturing insects and animals. What misery does the wanton cruelty of men inflict upon cocks, dogs, bulls, bears, and other creatures, which they seem to think were formed for no other end than to feast their savage spirits with their torments! If we form our judgment of men, when they seem most pleased, and have neither anger nor resentment to plead in their excuse, it is too evident, even from the nature of their amusements, whose they are and whom they serve; and they are the worst of enemies to each other. Think of the horrors of war, the rage of duellists, of the murders and assassinations with which the world is filled, and then say, "Lord, what "is man!" Further, if *deceit* and *treachery* belong to Satan's character, then surely man resembles him. Is not the universal observation, and complaint of all ages, an affecting comment upon the prophet's words, "Trust "ye not in a friend, put not confidence in a guide, keep "the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy "bosom, for they hunt every man his brother with a

" net." How many have at this moment cause to say with David, " The words of his mouth were smoother " than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were " softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords." Again: like Satan, men are eager in tempting others to sin; not content to damn themselves, they employ all their arts and influence to draw as many as they can with them into the same destruction. Lastly: In direct opposition to God and goodness, in contemptuous enmity to the Gospel of his grace, and a bitter persecuting spirit against those who profess it, Satan himself can hardly exceed them. Herein, indeed, they are his agents and willing servants; and because the blessed God is himself out of their reach, they labour to show their despite to him in the persons of his people.

I have drawn but a sketch, a few outlines of the picture of fallen man. To give an exact copy of him, to charge every feature with its full aggravation of horror, and to paint him *as he is*, would be impossible. Enough has been observed to illustrate the propriety of the exclamation, " Lord, what is man!" Perhaps some of my readers may attempt to deny or extenuate the charge, and may plead, that I have not been describing mankind, but some of the most abandoned of the species, who hardly deserve the name of men. But I have already provided against this exception. It is human nature I describe; and the vilest and most profligate individuals, cannot sin beyond the powers and limits of that nature which they possess in common with the more mild and moderate. Though there may be a difference in the fruitfulness of trees, yet the production of one apple decides the nature of the tree upon which it grew, as certainly as if it had produced a thousand: so in the present case, should it be allowed that these

enormities cannot be found in *all persons*, it would be a sufficient confirmation of what I have advanced, if they can be found in *any ;* unless it could be likewise proved, that those who appeared more wicked than others, were of a different species from the rest. But I need not make this concession ; they must be insensible indeed who do not feel something within them so very contrary to our common notions of goodness, as would perhaps make them rather submit to be banished from human society, than to be compelled *bona fide* to disclose to their fellow-creatures every thought and desire which arises in their hearts.

Many useful reflections may be drawn from this unpleasing subject. We cannot at present conceive how much we owe to the guardian care of Divine Providence, that any of us are preserved in peace and safety for a single day in such a world as this. Live where we will, we have those near us, who, both by nature, and by the power which Satan has over them, are capable of the most atrocious crimes. But he whom they know not, restrains them so that they cannot do the things that they would. When he suspends the restraint, they act immediately ; then we hear of murders, rapes, and outrages. But did not the Lord reign with a strong hand, such evils would be perpetrated every hour, and no one would be safe in the house or in the field. His ordinance of civil government is one great means of preserving the peace of society ; but this is in many cases inadequate. The heart of man, when fully bent upon evil, will not be intimidated or stopped by gibbets and racks.

How wonderful is the love of God in giving his Son to die for such wretches ! And how strong and absolute is the necessity of a new birth, if we would be

happy! Can beasts and devils inherit the kingdom of God? The due consideration of this subject is likewise needful, to preserve believers in an humble, thankful, watchful frame of Spirit. Such we once were, and such, with respect to the natural principle remaining in us, which the apostle calls the flesh or the old man, we still are. The propensities of fallen nature are not eradicated in the children of God, though by grace they are made partakers of a new principle, which enables them, in the Lord's strength, to resist and mortify the body of sin, so that it cannot reign in them. Yet they are liable to sad surprisals; and the histories of Aaron, David, Solomon, and Peter, are left on record, to teach us what evil is latent in the hearts of the best men, and what they are capable of doing if left but a little to themselves. "Lord, what is man!"

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXIV.

(2) *On Man in his Fallen Estate.*

Lord, what is Man!

Dear Sir,

THE nature of fallen man agrees to the description the apostle has given us of his boasted wisdom: it is earthly, sensual, devilish. I have attempted some general delineation of it in the preceding letter; but the height of its malignity cannot be properly estimated, unless we consider its actings with respect to the light of the Gospel. The Jews were extremely wicked at the time of our Lord's appearance upon earth; yet he

said of them, " If I had not come and spoken to them, " they had not had sin;" that is, as the light and power of his ministry deprived them of all excuse for continuing in sin, so it proved the occasion of showing their wickedness in the most aggravated manner; and all their other sins were but faint proofs of the true state of their hearts, if compared with the discovery they made of themselves, by their pertinacious opposition to *him.* In this sense, what the apostle has observed of the law of Moses, may be applied to the Gospel of Christ: it entered, that sin might abound. If we would estimate the utmost exertions of human depravity, and the strongest effects it is capable of producing, we must select our instances from the conduct of those to whom the Gospel is known. The Indians, who roast their enemies alive, give sufficient proof that man is *barbarous to his own kind;* which may likewise be easily demonstrated without going so far from home; but the preaching of the Gospel discovers *the enmity of the heart against God,* in ways and degrees of which unenlightened savages and heathens are not capable.

By the Gospel, I now mean not merely the doctrine of salvation as it lies in the holy Scripture, but that public and authoritative dispensation of this doctrine, which the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to his true ministers; who having been themselves, by the power of his grace, brought out of darkness into marvellous light, are by his Holy Spirit qualified and sent forth to declare to their fellow-sinners, what they have seen, and felt, and tasted, of the word of life. Their commission is, to exalt the Lord alone, to stain the pride of all human glory. They are to set forth the evil and demerit of sin, the strictness, spirituality, and sanction of the law of God, the total apostacy of mankind; and from

these premises to demonstrate the utter impossibility of a sinner's escaping condemnation by any works or endeavours of his own; and then to proclaim a full and free salvation from sin and wrath, by faith in the name, blood, obedience, and mediation of God manifest in the flesh; together with a denunciation of eternal misery to all who shall finally reject the testimony which God has given of his Son. Though these several branches of the will of God respecting sinners, and other truths in connexion with them, are plainly revealed and repeatedly inculcated in the Bible; and though the Bible is to be found in almost every house, yet we see, in fact, it is a sealed book, little read, little understood, and therefore but little regarded, except in those places which the Lord is pleased to favour with ministers who can confirm them from their own experience, and who, by a sense of his constraining love, and the worth of souls, are animated to make the faithful discharge of their ministry the one great business of their lives: who aim not to possess the wealth, but to promote the welfare of their hearers; are equally regardless of the frowns or smiles of the world; and count not their lives dear, so that they may be wise and successful in winning souls to Christ.

When the Gospel, in this sense of the word, first comes to a place, though the people are going on in sin, they may be said to sin ignorantly; they have not yet been warned of their danger. Some are drinking down iniquity like water; others more soberly burying themselves alive in the cares and business of the world; others find a little time for what they call religious duties, which they persevere in, though they are utter strangers to the nature or the pleasure of spiritual worship; partly, as thereby they think to bargain with God,

and to make amends for such sins as they do not choose to relinquish; and partly because it gratifies their pride, and affords them, (as they think,) some ground for saying, "God, I thank thee I am not as other men." The preached Gospel declares the vanity and danger of these several ways which sinners choose to walk in. It declares, and demonstrates, that, different as they appear from each other, they are equally remote from the path of safety and peace, and all tend to the same point, the destruction of those who persist in them. At the same time it provides against that despair into which men would be otherwise plunged, when convinced of their sins, by revealing the immense love of God, the glory and grace of Christ, and inviting all to come to him, that they may obtain pardon, life, and happiness. In a word, it shows the pit of hell under men's feet, and opens the gate and points out the way to heaven. Let us now briefly observe the effects it produces in those who do not receive it as the power of God unto salvation. These effects are various, as tempers and circumstances vary; but they may all lead us to adopt the Psalmist's exclamation, "Lord, what is man!"

Many who have heard the Gospel once or a few times, will hear it no more; it awakens their scorn, their hatred and rage. They pour contempt upon the wisdom of God, despise his goodness, defy his power; and their very looks express the spirit of the rebellious Jews, who told the prophet Jeremiah to his face, "As "to the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name "of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee at all." The ministers who preach it, are accounted men that turn the world upside down; and the people who receive it, fools or hypocrites. The word of the Lord is a burden to them, and they hate it with a perfect hatred. How

strongly is the disposition of the natural heart manifested, by the confusion which often takes place in families, where the Lord is pleased to awaken one or two in a house, while the rest remain in their sins! To profess, or even to be suspected of, an attachment to the Gospel of Christ, is frequently considered and treated as the worst of crimes, sufficient to cancel the strongest obligations of relation or friendship. Parents, upon such a provocation, will hate their children, and children ridicule their parents: many find, agreeable to our Lord's declaration, that from the time a sense of his love engaged their hearts to love him again, their worst foes have been those of their own household; and that they who expressed the greatest love and tenderness for them before their conversion, can now hardly bear to see them.

The bulk of a people will perhaps continue to hear, at least now and then, and to those who do, the Spirit of God usually, at one time or other, bears testimony to the truth: their consciences are struck, and for a season they believe and tremble. But what is the consequence? No man who has taken poison seeks more earnestly or speedily for an antidote, than those do for something to stifle and smother their convictions. They run to company, to drink, to any thing, for relief against the unwelcome intrusion of serious thoughts; and when they succeed, and recover their former indifference, they rejoice as if they had escaped some great danger. The next step is, to ridicule their own convictions; and next to that, if they see any of their acquaintance under the like impressions, to use every art, and strain every nerve, that they may render them as obstinate as themselves. For this purpose, they watch as a fowler for the bird, flatter or revile, tempt or threaten; and if they

can prevail, and are the occasion of hardening any in their sins, they rejoice and triumph as if they accounted it their interest and their glory to ruin the souls of their fellow-creatures.

By frequent hearing, they receive more light. They are compelled to know, whether they will or not, that the wrath of God hangs over the children of disobedience. They carry a sting in their consciences, and at times feel themselves most miserable, and cannot but wish they had never been born, or that they had been dogs or toads, rather than rational creatures. Yet they harden themselves still more. They affect to be happy and at ease, and force themselves to wear a smile when anguish preys upon their hearts. They blaspheme the way of truth, watch for the faults of professors, and with a malicious joy publish and aggravate them. They see perhaps how the wicked die, but are not alarmed; they see the righteous die, but are not moved. Neither providences nor ordinances, mercies nor judgments, can stop them; for they are determined to go on and perish with their eyes open, rather than submit to the Gospel.

But they do not always openly reject the Gospel-truths. Some who profess to approve and receive them, do thereby discover the evils of the heart of man, if possible, in a yet stronger light. They make Christ the minister of sin, and turn his grace into licentiousness. Like Judas, they say, Hail, Master! and betray him. This is the highest pitch of iniquity. They pervert all the doctrines of the Gospel. From election they draw an excuse for continuing in their evil ways; and contend for salvation without works, because they love not obedience. They extol the righteousness of Christ, but hold it in opposition to personal holiness.

In a word, because they hear that God is good, they determine to persist in evil. "Lord, what is man!"

Thus wilful and impenitent sinners go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. The word which they despise becomes to them a savour of death unto death. They take different courses, but all are travelling down to the pit: and, unless sovereign mercy interpose, will soon sink to rise no more. The final event is usually two-fold. Many, after they have been more or less shaken by the word, settle in formality. If hearing would supply the place of faith, love, and obedience, they would do well; but by degrees they become sermon-proof: the truths which once struck them lose their power by being often heard; and thus multitudes live and die in darkness, though the light has long shone around them. Others are more openly given up to a reprobate mind. Contempt of the Gospel makes Infidels, Deists, and Atheists. They are filled with a spirit of delusion to believe a lie. These are scoffers, walking after their own lusts; for where the principles of religion are given up, the conduct will be vile and abominable. Such persons sport themselves with their own deceivings, and strongly prove the truth of the Gospel, while they dispute against it. We often find that people of this cast have formerly been the subjects of strong convictions; but when the evil spirit has seemed to depart for a season, and returns again, the last state of that person is worse than the first.

It is not improbable that some of my readers may meet with their own characters, under one or other of the views I have given of the desperate wickedness of the heart, in its actings against the truth. May the Spirit of God constrain them to read with attention! Your case is dangerous, but I would hope not utterly

desperate. Jesus is mighty to save. His grace can pardon the most aggravated offences, and subdue the most inveterate habits of sin. The Gospel you have hitherto slighted, resisted, or opposed, is still the power of God unto salvation. The blood of Jesus, upon which you have hitherto trampled, speaks better things than the blood of Abel, and is of virtue to cleanse those whose sins are scarlet and crimson, and to make them white as snow. As yet you are spared; but it is high time to stop, to throw down your arms of rebellion, and humble yourselves at his feet. If you do, you may yet escape; but if not, know assuredly that wrath is coming upon you to the uttermost; and you will shortly find, to your unspeakable dismay, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXV.

Whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things are of good Report,—think on these Things. Phil. iv. 8.

Dear Sir,

THE precept which I have chosen for my motto is applicable to many particulars, which are but seldom and occasionally mentioned from the pulpit. There are improprieties of conduct, which, though usually considered as foibles that hardly deserve a severe censure, are properly sinful; for though some of them may not seem to violate any express command of Scripture, yet they are contrary to that accuracy and circumspection which become our profession. A Christian, by the tenor of his high calling, is bound to avoid even the

appearance of evil; and his deportment should not only be upright as to his leading principles, but amiable and engaging, and as free as possible from every inconsistence and blemish. The characters of some valuable persons are clouded; and the influence they might otherwise have, greatly counteracted by comparatively small faults: yet faults they certainly are; and it would be well if they could be made so sensible of them, and of their ill effects, as that they might earnestly watch, and strive, and pray against them. I know not how to explain myself better than by attempting the outlines of a few portraits, to each of which I apprehend some strong resemblances may be found in real life. I do not wish to set my readers to work to find out such resemblances among their neighbours; but would advise them to examine carefully, whether they cannot, in one or other of them, discover some traces of their own features: and though I speak of men only, counterparts to the several characters may doubtless be found here and there among the women; for the imperfections and evils of a fallen nature, are equally entailed upon both sexes.

Austerus is a solid and exemplary Christian. He has a deep, extensive, and experimental knowledge of divine things. Inflexibly and invariably true to his principles, he stems with a noble singularity the torrent of the world, and can neither be bribed nor intimidated from the path of duty. He is a rough diamond of great intrinsic value, and would sparkle with a distinguished lustre, if he were more polished: but though the word of God is his daily study, and he prizes the precepts, as well as the promises, more than thousands of gold and silver, there is one precept he seems to have overlooked; I mean that of the apostle, Be courteous. Instead of that gentleness and condescension which will

always be expected from a professed follower of the meek and lowly Jesus; there is a harshness in his manner, which makes him more admired than beloved; and they who truly love him, often feel more constraint than pleasure when in his company. His intimate friends are satisfied that he is no stranger to true humility of heart; but these are few. By others he is thought proud, dogmatic, and self-important; nor can this prejudice against him be easily removed, until he can lay aside that cynical air which he has unhappily contracted.

HUMANUS is generous and benevolent. His feelings are lively, and his expressions of them strong. No one is more distant from sordid views, or less influenced by a selfish spirit. His heart burns with love to Jesus, and he is ready to receive with open arms all who love his Saviour. Yet with an upright and friendly spirit, which entitles him to the love and esteem of all who know him, he has not every thing we would wish in a friend. In some respects, though not in the most criminal sense, he bridleth not his tongue. Should you, without witness or writing, intrust him with untold gold, you would run no risk of loss; but if you intrust him with a secret, you thereby put it in the possession of the public. Not that he would wilfully betray you, but it is his infirmity. He knows not how to keep a secret; it escapes from him before he is aware. So likewise as to matters of fact: in things which are of great importance, and where he is sufficiently informed, no man has a stricter regard to truth; but in the smaller concerns of common life, whether it be from credulity, or from a strange and blameable inadvertence, he frequently grieves and surprises those who know his real character, by saying *the thing that is not*. Thus they

to whom he opens his very heart, dare not make him returns of equal confidence; and they who in some cases would venture their lives upon his word, in others are afraid of telling a story after him. How lamentable are such blemishes in such a person!

Prudens, though not of a generous natural temper, is a partaker of that grace which opens the heart, and inspires a disposition to love and to good works. He bestows not his alms to be seen of men; but they who have the best opportunities of knowing what he does for the relief of others, and of comparing it with his ability, can acquit him in good measure of the charge which another part of his conduct exposes him to. For Prudens is a great economist; and though he would not willingly wrong or injure any person, yet the meannesses to which he will submit, either to save or gain a penny in what he accounts an honest way, are a great discredit to his profession. He is punctual in fulfilling his engagements; but exceedingly hard, strict, and suspicious in making his bargains. And in his dress, and every article of his personal concerns, he is content to be so much below the station in which the providence of God has placed him, that to those who are not acquainted with his private benefactions to the poor, he appears under the hateful character of a miser, and to be governed by that love of money which the Scripture declares to be the root of all evil, and inconsistent with the true love of God and of the saints.

Volatilis is sufficiently exact in performing his promises in such instances as he thinks of real importance. If he bids a person depend upon his assistance, he will not disappoint his expectations. Perhaps he is equally sincere in all his promises at the time of making them; but for want of method in the management of his

affairs, he is always in a hurry, always too late, and has always some engagement upon his hands with which it is impossible he can comply: yet he goes on in this way, exposing himself and others to continual disappointments. He accepts, without a thought, proposals which are incompatible with each other, and will perhaps undertake to be at two or three different and distant places at the same hour. This has been so long his practice, that nobody now expects him till they see him. In other respects he is a good sort of man; but this want of punctuality, which runs through his whole deportment, puts every thing out of course in which he is concerned, abroad and at home. Volatilis excuses himself as well as he can, and chiefly by alleging, that the things in which he fails are of no great consequence. But he would do well to remember, that truth is a sacred thing, and ought not to be violated in the smallest matters, without an unforeseen and unavoidable prevention. Such a trifling turn of spirit lessens the weight of a person's character, though he makes no pretensions to religion, and is a still greater blemish in a professor.

Cessator is not chargeable with being buried in the cares and business of the present life to the neglect of the one thing needful; but he greatly neglects the duties of his station. Had he been sent into the world only to read, pray, hear sermons, and join in religious conversation, he might pass for an eminent Christian. But though it is to be hoped, that his abounding in these exercises springs from a heart-attachment to divine things, his conduct evidences that his judgment is weak, and his views of his Christian calling are very narrow and defective. He does not consider, that waiting upon God in the public and private ordinances is designed, not to excuse us from the discharge of the

duties of civil life, but to instruct, strengthen, and qualify us for their performance. His affairs are in disorder, and his family and connexions are likely to suffer by his indolence. He thanks God that he is not wordly-minded; but he is an idle and unfaithful member of society, and causes the way of truth to be evil spoken of. Of such the apostle has determined, that "if any man "will not work, neither should he eat."

Curiosus is upright and unblameable in his general deportment, and no stranger to the experiences of a true Christian. His conversation upon these subjects is often satisfactory and edifying. He would be a much more agreeable companion, were it not for an impertinent desire of knowing every body's business, and the grounds of every hint that is occasionally dropped in discourse where he is present. This puts him upon asking a multiplicity of needless and improper questions; and obliges those who know him, to be continually upon their guard, and to treat him with reserve. He catechises even strangers, and is unwilling to part with them till he is punctually informed of all their connexions, employments, and designs. For this idle curiosity he is marked and avoided as a busy-body; and they who have the best opinion of him, cannot but wonder that a man, who appears to have so many better things to employ his thoughts, should find leisure to amuse himself with what does not at all concern him. Were it not for the rules of civility, he would be affronted every day: and if he would attend to the cold and evasive answers he receives to his inquiries, or even to the looks with which they are accompanied, he might learn, that, though he means no harm, he appears to a great disadvantage, and that this prying disposition, is very unpleasing.

QUERULUS wastes much of his precious time in declaiming against the management of public affairs; though he has neither access to the springs which move the wheels of government, nor influence either to accelerate or retard their motions. Our national concerns are no more affected by the remonstrances of Querulus, than the heavenly bodies are by the disputes of astronomers. While the news-papers are the chief sources of his intelligence, and his situation precludes him from being a competent judge either of matters of fact, or matters of right, why should Querulus trouble himself with politics? This would be a weakness, if we consider him only as a member of society; but if we consider him as a Christian, it is worse than weakness: it is a sinful conformity to the men of the world, who look no further than to second causes, and forget that the LORD REIGNS. If a Christian be placed in a public sphere of action, he should undoubtedly be faithful to his calling, and endeavour by all lawful methods to transmit our privileges to posterity: but it would be better for Querulus to let the dead bury the dead. There are people enough to make a noise about political matters, who know not how to employ their time to better purpose. Our Lord's kingdom is not of this world; and most of his people may do their country much more essential service by pleading for it in prayer, than by finding fault with things which they have no power to alter. If Querulus had opportunity of spending a few months under some of the governments upon the continent, (I may indeed say under any of them,) he would probably bring home with him a more grateful sense of the Lord's goodness to him, in appointing his lot in Britain. As it is, his zeal is not only unprofitable to others, but hurtful to himself. It embitters his spirit, it diverts his thoughts from things of

greater importance, and prevents him from feeling the value of those blessings, civil and religious, which he actually possesses: and could he, (as he wishes,) prevail on many to act in the same spirit, the governing powers might be irritated to take every opportunity of abridging that religious liberty which we are favoured with above all the nations upon earth. Let me remind Querulus, that the hour is approaching, when many things, which at present too much engross his thoughts and inflame his passions, will appear as foreign to him as what is now transacting among the Tartars or Chinese.

Other improprieties of conduct, which lessen the influence, and spot the profession of some who wish well to the cause of Christ, might be enumerated, but these may suffice for a specimen.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXVI.

To a gay Friend, on his Recovery from Illness.

Dear Sir,

I SUPPOSE you will receive many congratulations on your recovery from your late dangerous illness; most of them perhaps more sprightly and better turned, but none, I persuade myself, more sincere and affectionate than mine. I beg you would prepare yourself by this good opinion of me, before you read further: and let the reality of my regard excuse what you may dislike in my manner of expressing it.

When a person is returned from a doubtful distant voyage, we are naturally led to inquire into the incidents he has met with, and the discoveries he has made. In-

dulge me in a curiosity of this kind, especially as my affection gives me an interest and concern in the event. You have been, my friend, upon the brink, the very edge of an eternal state; but God has restored you back to the world again. Did you meet with, or have you brought back, nothing *new?* Did nothing occur to stop or turn your usual train of thought? Were your apprehensions of invisible things exactly the same in the height of your disorder, when you were cut off from the world and all its engagements, as when you were in perfect health, and in the highest enjoyment of your own inclinations? If you answer me, "Yes, all things are just "the same as formerly, the difference between sickness "and health only excepted;" I am at a loss how to reply. I can only sigh and wonder; *sigh*, that it should be thus with any, that it should be thus with you, whom I dearly love; and *wonder*, since this unhappy case, strange as it seems in one view, is yet so frequent, why it was not always thus with myself; for long and often it was just so. Many a time, when sickness had brought me, as we say, to death's door, I was as easy and insensible as the sailor, who, in the height of a storm, should presume to sleep upon the top of the mast, quite regardless that the next tossing wave might plunge him into the raging ocean, beyond all possibility of relief. But at length a day came, which, though the most terrible day I ever saw, I can now look back upon with thankfulness and pleasure: I say, the time came, when, in such a helpless extremity, and under the expectation of immediate death, it pleased God to command the vail from my eyes, and I saw things, in some measure, as they really were. Imagine with yourself, a person trembling upon the point of a dreadful precipice, a powerful and inexorable enemy eager to push him down,

and an assemblage of all that is horrible waiting at the bottom for his fall; even this will give you but a faint representation of the state of my mind at that time. Believe me, it was not a whim or a dream, which changed my sentiments and conduct, but a powerful conviction, which will not admit the least doubt; an evidence which, like that I have of my own existence, I cannot call in question without contradicting all my senses. And though my case was in some respects uncommon, yet something like it is known by one and another every day: and I have myself conversed with many, who, after a course of years spent in defending Deistical principles, or indulging libertine practices, when they have thought themselves confirmed in their schemes, by the cool assent of what they then deemed Impartial Reason, have been, like me, brought to glory in the cross of Christ, and to live by that faith which they had before slighted and opposed. By these instances, I know that nothing is too hard for the Almighty. The same power which humbled me, can undoubtedly bring down the most haughty infidel upon earth. And as I likewise knew, that, to show his power, he is often pleased to make use of weak instruments, I am encouraged, notwithstanding the apparent difficulty of succeeding, to warn those over whom friendship or affection gives me any influence, of the evil and the danger of a course of life formed upon the prevailing maxims of the world. So far as I neglect this, I am unfaithful in my professions both to God and man.

I shall not at present trouble you in an argumentative way. If by dint of reasoning I could effect some change in your notions, my arguments, unless applied by a superior power, would still leave your heart unchanged and untouched. A man may give his assent

to the Gospel, and be able to defend it against others, and yet not have his own spirit truly influenced by it. This thought I shall leave with you, that if your scheme be not true to a demonstration, it must necessarily be false; for the issue is too important to make a doubt on the dangerous side tolerable. If the Christian could possibly be mistaken, he is still upon equal terms with those who pronounce him to be so; but if the Deist be wrong, (that is, if we are in the right,) the consequence to him must be unavoidable and intolerable. This, you will say, is a trite argument: I own it; but, beaten as it is, it will never be worn out or answered.

Permit me to remind you that the points in debate between us are already settled in themselves, and that our talking cannot alter or affect the nature of things; for they will be as they are, whatever apprehensions we may form of them: and remember likewise, that we must all, each one for himself, experience on which side the truth lies. I used a wrong word, when I spoke of your *recovery;* my dear friend, look upon it only as a *reprieve;* for you carry the sentence of death about with you still; and unless you should be cut off, (which God of his mercy forbid!) by a sudden stroke, you will as surely lie upon a death-bed, as you have been now raised from a bed of sickness. And remember likewise, (how can I bear to write it!) that, should you neglect my admonitions, they will, notwithstanding, have an effect upon you, though not such an effect as I could wish. They will render you more inexcusable. I have delivered my own soul, by faithfully warning you: but if you will not examine the matter with that seriousness it calls for; if you will not look up to God, the former of your body, and the preserver of your spirit, for direction and assistance how to please him; if you will

have your reading and conversation only on one side of the question; if you determine to let afflictions and dangers, mercies and deliverances, all pass without reflection and improvement; if you will spend your life as though you thought you were sent into the world only to eat, sleep, and play, and, after a course of years, be extinguished like the snuff of a candle;—why, then, you must abide the consequences. But, assuredly, sooner or later, God will meet you. My hearty daily prayer is, that it may be in a way of mercy, and that you may be added to the number of the trophies of his invincible grace.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXVII.

Some Points of Christian Experience considered.

To a Friend.

Dear Sir,

I TRUST the difference of our sentiments, since we are agreed in the one thing needful, will no more interrupt our union and fellowship, than the difference of our features, or the tone of our voices. I wish you to believe that I would be no advocate for carelessness or formality. I hope my conscience bears me witness, that, besides trusting in the letter of the Scripture, I likewise desire an increase of that inward and comfortable sense of divine things in which I believe you are happy; and that I wish not only to be a subject of the kingdom of Jesus, but likewise to have that kingdom powerfully set up in my heart, which consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Indeed,

I see not how these can be distinguished, or what ground I could have to think myself a subject of his kingdom, unless I earnestly desired to have that kingdom in all its branches and blessings flourishing in my soul. I do not know that I live in the neglect of any means appointed of God for my growth in these blessings, or willingly allow myself in what is inconsistent with them; I think my heart is habitually in the pursuit of them, and that there is seldom an hour in any day when lively communion with my God, in Christ, is not present to my view as the chief good. To this purpose, through grace, I can venture to express myself to *man*, though still it is true, when I come before the Lord, notwithstanding the diligence and circumspection I would aim at, I see myself a poor, inconsistent creature, that my strength is perfect weakness, and all I have is sin. I confess I am afraid of fixing the criterion of a work of grace too high, lest the mourners in Zion should be discouraged; because I find it is the will of God that such should not be discouraged, but comforted; and because it appears to me, that the scriptural marks have respect rather to desires, if real, than to attainments, or at least to those attainments which are often possessed by persons who are kept very short of sensible comforts, Matth. v. 3—9. Luke xviii. 12, 13. 1 Pet. ii. 7.

The points between you and me seem chiefly the following: 1. When may a person be properly denominated a believer? 2. What are the proper evidences and necessary concomitants of a lively thriving frame of spirit? 3. Whether such a degree of faithfulness to light received, as is consistent with the remnant of a depraved nature in our present state, will certainly and always preserve our souls from declensions and winter-

seasons? 4. Whether that gracious humility, which arises from a due sense of our own vileness, and of the riches of divine grace, be ordinarily attainable without some mortifying experience of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of our own hearts? A few lines upon each of these particulars, will, I think, take in the chief parts of your letter.

I. We differ something with respect to what constitutes a believer. I own nothing has surprised me more, in the course of our friendly debate, than your supposing that a person should date his conversion and his commencing a believer, from the time of his receiving the Gospel-truths with that clearness and power as to produce in him an abiding assurance. The apostle, in Eph. i. 13, makes a plain distinction between believing and being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. By the experience and observation of many years, I have been more and more persuaded, that to represent assurance as being of the essence of faith, is not agreeable to the Scripture, which in many places either expressly asserts, or strongly intimates, the contrary, John i. 50, and xx. 29. Rom. x. 9. 1 John v. 1. Whoever is not a believer, must be an unbeliever; there can be no medium. Either there are many believers who have not assurance, or else there are many unbelievers who love the Lord Jesus, hate sin, are poor in spirit, and adorn the doctrine of the Gospel by their temper and conversation: and I doubt not but those who now have assurance, had, before they attained it, a something which wrought by love, and overcame the world. I know no principle capable of these effects but faith, which, though at first it be like a grain of mustard-seed, is the seed of God: though it be faint, it is genuine, as the dawning light is of the same nature with that which

flows from the noon-day sun. I allow that while faith is weak, there may be little *solid comfort*, if by that expression, *abiding comfort* be meant. Faith gives safety and spiritual life: abiding peace and establishment follow the sealing of the Spirit. But though an infant has not the strength, activity, and understanding, which he will attain when he arrives to the age of manhood, he is as fully possessed of a principle of life, while he is an infant, as at any time afterwards.

II. We seem to differ likewise as to the marks of a lively thriving spirit; at least if any are supposed to be better or surer than those to which our Lord has promised blessedness, Matth. v. 3—9. He has said, "Blessed are they that mourn;" but he has not said, More blessed are they that are comforted. They are to be sure more happy at present; but their blessedness consists not in their present comforts, but in those perceptions of Gospel-truths, which form them to that contrite spirit in which God delighteth, (Is. lvii. 18,) and which make them capable of divine comforts, and spiritual hungerings and thirstings after them. Perhaps we do not argue *ad idem;* we may mean different things. I would not represent myself as a stranger to peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. In the midst of all my conflicts, I have a heart-felt satisfaction from the Gospel, which nothing else could give. But I mean, though this be with me as an abiding principle, it rarely affords me what I think you intend when you speak of sensible comforts. I cannot feel that warmth of heart, that glowing of love, which the knowledge of such a Saviour should inspire. I account it my sin, and I feel it my burden, that I cannot. And when I truly do this, when I can abhor myself for my stupidity, mourn over it, and humbly look up to the Lord for relief against it, I judge my

soul to be at such times as much alive to God, as it would be if he saw fit to increase my comfort. Let me always either rejoice in him, or mourn after him, I would leave the alternative to him, who knows best how to suit his dispensations to my state; and I trust he knows that I do not say this because I set a small value upon his presence. As to the experience of the apostles, I believe they were patterns to all succeeding believers; but with some regard to the several trials and services to which we may be called in this world, he distributes severally to all his people according to his own will, yet with a wise and gracious accommodation to the circumstances and situations of each. The apostle Paul connects the aboundings of his consolations with the aboundings of his afflictions, and with the state of the people to whom he preached, 2 Cor. i. 4—7. And if, instead of preaching the Gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum in the face of persecution, he had lived in a land of liberty, and been confined to a parochial cure, for aught I know, his cup might not have run over so often. Succeeding ministers of the Gospel, when called to very laborious and painful services, have, for the like reasons, been often favoured with a double portion of that joy which makes hard things easy, and bitter things sweet. And, in general, all the Lord's people who walk humbly before him, may expect that in or after seasons of great trial, and in proportion to their pressures, he will favour them with peculiar comforts. It is in this way, he in a great measure fulfils his promise of making their strength equal to their day. And I am enabled to trust him in this matter, that if he should at any time see fit to call me to a more difficult and dangerous sphere of service, or lead me into the furnace of affliction, he would, if he saw it needful, support and refresh

me by such manifestations of his glory and love, as I know but little of at present. In a word, a humble dependent frame of spirit, perseverance in the use of appointed means, care to avoid all occasions of sin, an endeavour to glorify God in our callings, and an eye to Jesus as our all in all;—these things are to me sure indications that the soul is right, that the Lord is present, and that grace is thriving and in exercise, whether sensible consolations abound or not.

III. I propose the third question, concerning such a degree of faithfulness to light received, as is consistent *with the remnants of a depraved nature*, because I apprehend one effect of indwelling sin is, to render it morally impossible for us to be *entirely* faithful to that light and power which God has given us. It may sound like a contradiction to say, we cannot do what we can do: but there are many enigmas in a believer's experience, at least in mine; and I never expect to meet the man that knows his own heart, that will say he is always faithful, diligent, and obedient, to the full extent of his ability; I rather expect he would confess, with me, that he feels a need of more ability, and fresh supplies of grace, to enable him to make a better improvement of what he has already received. If some, as you suppose, in their dullest frames, can read the Bible, go to the throne of grace, and mourn, (as they ought,) over what is amiss, I must say for myself, I can, and I cannot. Without doubt I *can* take the Bible in my hand, and force myself to read it; I *can* kneel down, and I can see I *ought* to mourn: but to understand and attend to what I read, to engage my *heart* in prayer, or to be duly humbled under the sense of so dark and dissipated a state of mind; these things, at some seasons, I can no more do than I can raise the

dead; and yet I cannot plead positive inability. I am satisfied that what prevents me is my sin, but it is the sin of my nature, the sin that dwelleth in me. And I expect it will be thus with me at times, in a greater or less degree, till this body of sin shall be wholly destroyed. Yet I believe the Lord is with me, even when he seems to be absent, otherwise my corruptions, at such seasons, might easily prevail to betray me into open or allowed sin, which, blessed be the grace and care of my good Shepherd, is not the case. I know not if I rightly understand the expression, "We may humbly hope, that those things we fall into, which are not "in our power to prevent, will not be set to our account." The least of the evils I feel, and which seem most involuntary, if set to my account, would ruin me; and I trust, that even my worst deviations shall not appear against me, because I am a believer in Jesus: and I know, and am sure, that I do not wish to continue in sin that grace may abound. My conscience bears me witness, that I would not desire the rule of duty to be narrowed, or accommodated to my imperfections in a single instance. If the expression only means, that these unavoidable effects of our evil nature should not break our peace of conscience, or discourage us in our approaches to God, I am of the same mind; through mercy I have seldom any more doubt of my acceptance in the Beloved, when in a dark frame, than when I am most favoured with liberty.

IV. Whether true evangelical humility, and an enlarged view of the grace of God in Christ triumphing over all obstacles, be ordinarily attainable without an experience of declensions, backslidings, and repeated forgiveness? is the last question I shall consider. I dare say you will do me the justice to believe, that I

would not advise any one to run into sin in order to get a knowledge of his own heart: David broke his bones thereby; he obtained an affecting proof of his inability of standing in his own strength, and of the skill and goodness of his physician who healed him: yet no man in his wits would break his bones for the sake of making experiments, if he were ever so sure they would be well set again. You think that a believer is never more humble in his own eyes, or admires Jesus more, than when he is filled with joy and peace; I readily allow, that the *present* impressions of divine love are humbling; however, the direct tendency of gracious consolations in themselves, is one thing; what evils they may afterwards occasion through the desperate depravity of our hearts, is another. We have a memorable case in point to explain my meaning. The apostle Paul's recollection of his course while in a natural state, and the singular manner of his conversion, were evidently suited to make him a humble Christian, and he was so. By an especial favour of the Lord, he was afterwards taken up into the third heaven; what he saw or heard there he has not told us, but surely he met with nothing that could have a tendency to make him proud; doubtless he saw Jesus in his glory, and the humble spiritual worship of heaven; a sight which we might deem sufficient to make him walk in self-abasement all the days of his life: but Paul, though an eminent saint, was still liable to the effects of indwelling sin; he was in danger of being exalted through the abundance of revelations, and the Lord, his wise and gracious keeper, saw fit, in order to prevent it, that a messenger from Satan should be given him to buffet him. Pride is so subtle, that it can gather strength even from those gracious manifestations which seem directly calculated to mortify it; so

dangerous, that a messenger from Satan himself may be esteemed a mercy, if over-ruled and sanctified by the Lord to make or keep us more humble: therefore, though we can never be too earnest in striving against sin, too watchful in abstaining from all appearance of evil, and though they who wait upon the Lord may comfortably hope, that he will preserve them from such things as would dishonour their profession in the sight of men, yet I apprehend they who appear most to adorn the Gospel in their outward conversation, are conscious of many things between the Lord and their own souls, which covers them with shame, and that his tenderness and mercy to them, notwithstanding their perverseness, constrains them with admiration to adopt the language of Micah, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardon-"eth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the "remnant of his heritage?" and I believe likewise, that without such striking and repeated proofs of what is in their hearts, they would not so feelingly enter into the spirit of Job's confession, "Behold, I am vile!" nor would they have such a lively sense of their obligations to the merciful care and faithfulness of their great Shepherd, or of their entire and absolute dependence upon him, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption: I find these considerations useful and necessary to reconcile me to my lot. The Lord knows what I need, and what I can bear: gladly would I receive, earnestly would I desire, more of comforts while here; but if I mourn now, I hope to be comforted in heaven; in the mean time it is more immediately necessary for me, both as a Christian and as a minister, that I should be humbled: the Lord's will be done. I cannot pretend to determine what ministers, or what body of people, come nearest the character of the primitive time;

but in my judgment they are the happiest who have the lowest thoughts of themselves, and in whose eyes Jesus is most glorious and precious.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXVIII.

That True Religion is necessary, in order to the best Enjoyment of the Pleasures of the present Life.

To a gay Friend.

Dear Sir,

THOUGH I truly love you, and have no reason to doubt of the reality of your friendship to me; yet I cannot but apprehend, that notwithstanding our mutual regard, and my frequent attempts to be witty, (if I could,) for your diversion, there is a something in most of my letters, (which I cannot, dare not wholly suppress,) that disgusts and wearies you, and makes you less inclined to keep up a frequent intercourse, than you would otherwise be. Rather than lose you quite, I will in general spare you as much as I can; but at present you must bear with me, and allow me full scope. You have given me a challenge, which I know not how to pass over; and since you so far justify my preaching, as to condescend to preach, (in your way,) yourself, permit me for this time to preach again, and to take some passages in your letter for my text.

In the present debate I will accept your compliment, and suppose myself to be, as you say, a man of sense. You allow, then, that *all* the sense is not on your side. This, indeed, you cannot deny; for whatever becomes of

me, it is needless to tell you, that Hale, Boyle, and other great names I could mention, were men of as great penetration and judgment, had as good opportunities, and took as much pains to be informed of the truth, as any of the advocates for infidelity can pretend to. And you cannot, with any modesty or consistence, absolutely determine, that they had not as good grounds for thinking themselves right, as you can have for concluding they were wrong.

But declining the advantage of human authority, I am content the point should rest between you and me. And here I beg you to observe, that I have one evident advantage over you in judging, namely, that I have experienced the good and evil on *both* sides, and you only on *one*. If you were to send me an inventory of your pleasures, how charmingly your time runs on, and how dexterously it is divided between the coffee-house, play-house, the card-table, and tavern, with intervals of balls, concerts, &c.; I could answer, that most of these I have tried and tried again, and know the utmost they can yield, and have seen enough of the rest, most heartily to despise them all. Setting religion entirely out of the question, I profess I had rather be a worm to crawl upon the ground than to bear the name of MAN, upon the poor terms of whiling away my life in an unsipid round of such insignificant and unmanly trifles. I will return your own expression—I believe you to be a person of sense; but, alas! how do you prostitute your talents and capacity; how far do you act below yourself, if you know no higher purpose of life than these childish dissipations, together with the more serious business of rising early and sitting up late, to amass money, that you may be able to enlarge your expenses! I am sure, while I lived in these things, I found them unsatisfying and

empty to the last degree; and the only advantage they afforded, (miserable are they who are forced to *deem* it an advantage,) was, that they often relieved me from the trouble and burden of thinking. If you have any other pleasures than these, they are such as must be evil and inconvenient, even upon your own plan; and therefore my friendship will not allow me to bring them into the account. I am willing to hope you do not stoop still lower in pursuit of satisfaction. Thus far we stand upon even ground. You know all that a life of pleasure can give, and I know it likewise.

On the other hand, if I should attempt to explain to you the source and streams of *my* best pleasures, such as a comfortable assurance of the pardon of my sins, an habitual communion with the God who made heaven and earth, a calm reliance on the Divine Providence, the cheering prospect of a better life in a better world, with the pleasing foretastes of heaven in my own soul; should I, or could I, tell you the pleasure I often find in reading the Scripture, in the exercise of prayer, and in that sort of preaching and conversation which you despise; I doubt not but you would think as meanly of my happiness as I do of yours. But here lies the difference, my dear friend, you condemn that which you have never tried. You know no more of these things than a blind man does of colours; and, notwithstanding all your flourishes, I defy you to be at all times able to satisfy yourself, that things may not possibly be as I have represented them.

Besides, what do I lose upon my plan, that should make me so worthy of your pity? Have you a quicker relish in the prudent use of temporal comforts? Do you think I do not eat my food with as much pleasure as you can do, though perhaps with less cost and variety?

Is your sleep sounder than mine? Have not I as much satisfaction in social life? It is true, to join much with the gay fluttering tribe, who spend their days in laugh and sing-song, is equally contrary to my duty and inclination. But I have friends and acquaintance as well as you. Among the many who favour me with their esteem and friendship, there are some who are persons of sense, learning, wit, and, (what perhaps may weigh as much with you,) of fortune and distinction. And if you should say, "Ay, but they are all enthusiasts like yourself," you would say nothing to the purpose; since upon your maxim, that "happiness is according to opinion," it cannot be an objection, but the contrary, to have my acquaintance to my own taste. Thus much for the brighter side of your situation;—or let me add one thing more. I know you have thoughts of marriage: do you think, if you should enter into this relation, your principles are calculated to make you more happy in it than I am? You are well acquainted with our family-life. Do you propose to know more of the peace and heart-felt joy of domestic union than I have known, and continue to know to this hour? I wish you may equal us; and if you do, we shall still be as before, but upon even ground. I need not turn Deist, to enjoy the best and the most that this life can afford.

But I need not tell you, that the present life is not made up of pleasurable incidents only. Pain, sickness, losses, disappointments, injuries, and affronts with men, will, more or less, at one time or other, be our lot. And can you bear these trials better than I? You will not pretend to it. Let me appeal to yourself: How often do you toss and disquiet yourself, like a wild bull in a net, when things cross your expectations? As your thoughts are more engrossed by what you see, you

must be more keenly sensible of what you feel. You cannot view these trials as appointed by a wise and heavenly Father in subservience to your good; you cannot taste the sweetness of his promises, nor feel the secret supports of his strength, in an hour of affliction; you cannot so cast your burden and care upon him, as to find a sensible relief to your spirit thereby; nor can you see his hand engaged and employed in effecting your deliverance. Of these things you know no more than of the art of flying; but I seriously assure you, and I believe my testimony will go further with you than my judgment, that they are realities, and that I have found them to be so. When my worldly concerns have been most thorny and discouraging, I have once and again felt the most of that peace which the world can neither give nor take away. However, I may state the case still lower. You do pretty well among your friends; but how do you like being alone? Would you not give something for that happy secret, which could enable you to pass a rainy day pleasantly, without the assistance of business, company, or amusement? Would it not mortify you greatly to travel for a week in an unfrequented road, where you should meet with no lively incidents to recruit and raise your spirits? Alas! what a poor scheme of pleasure is yours, that will not support an interval of reflection!

What you have heard is true; I have a few friends who meet at my house once a-fortnight, and we spend an hour or two in worshipping the God who made us. And can this move your indignation, or your compassion? Does it show a much nobler spirit, a more refined way of thinking, to live altogether without God in the world? If I kept a card-assembly at those times, it would not displease you. How can you, as a person of sense, avoid

being shocked at your own unhappy prejudice? But I remember how it was once with myself, and forbear to wonder. May He who has opened my eyes, open yours! He only can do it. I do not expect to convince you by any thing I can say as of myself; but if he be pleased to make use of me as his instrument then you will be convinced. How should I then rejoice! I should rejoice to be useful to any one, but especially to you, whom I dearly love. May God show you your true self, and your true state; then you will attentively listen to what you disdain to hear of, his goodness in providing redemption and pardon for the chief of sinners, through him who died upon the cross for sins not his own. Keep this letter by you at my request; and when you write, tell me that you receive it in good part; and that you still believe me to be, &c.

LETTER XXXIX.

A Word in Season.

Dear Sir,

IN this dark and declining day, when iniquity abounds, the awful tokens of God's displeasure are multiplying around us, and too many professors, not duly sensible of the real cause of all the evils we either feel, or have reason to fear, are disputing, instead of praying; may the Lord bestow upon you and me, and upon all who fear his name, a spirit suited to the times! that the words of David, "I beheld the transgressors, and was "grieved," may express the very sensation and frame of our hearts. Permit me to keep this expression in

my view, while I write, though it may perhaps give my letter something of the air of a sermon.

The Hebrew word answering to "I was grieved," signifies such a kind of grief as is mixed with *dislike;* such a grief as a believer *must* feel when he has a sense of his own corruptions. It is frequently rendered, as in Ezek. xx. 43. to *loathe:* "You shall loathe yourselves "in your own sight." We are not required, strictly, to hate *ourselves*, but the *evil* that is in us. So, when we look at transgressors, we are not to *hate*, but to pity them, mourn over them, and pray for them; nor have we any right to *boast* over them; for, by nature, and of ourselves, *we* are NO BETTER than *they*. But their sinfulness should cause a *dislike*, an holy indignation: as it is recorded of our Lord, who, though full of compassion and tenderness, so that he wept over his enemies, and prayed for his actual murderers, yet looked upon transgressors with *anger*, being *grieved* for the hardness of their hearts.

A feeling of this kind seems essential to that new nature which characterises the children of God; and, where it is not in habitual exercise, it is a sufficient evidence, that the soul, if truly alive to God at all, is at least in a *lean* and *distempered* state. Who can avoid being grieved and hurt by that which is in direct opposition to what he most loves? Believers love HOLINESS; and, unless when stupified by the arts of Satan, can hardly bear themselves for what they find contrary to it within their own breasts; and must, therefore, of course, be *grieved* with the sins of others. Like righteous Lot, and from his principles they are "vexed "with the conversation of the wicked." Can they who reverence the name of God be easy and unconcerned when they hear it blasphemed? No; their ears are

wounded, and their hearts are pained. Can they who are followers of peace and purity, behold, unmoved, the riots, licentiousness, and daring wickedness, of those who have cast off both shame and fear? Can they who have bowels of mercy and compassion, be unaffected when they see the iron hand of oppression grinding the faces of the poor? Or can any who love the songs of Zion, help being shocked with the songs of drunkards? I trust there are many, who, upon these accounts, are daily crying, "My soul is among lions:" "Wo is me "that I dwell in Mesech!" "O gather not my soul "with sinners." The thought of being shut up for ever with the ungodly would be terrible as hell to a gracious soul, though there were no devouring fire, no keen sense of the wrath of God, to be feared.

They are grieved likewise upon their Lord's account; for they have obtained a spark of zeal for his honour and glory. With Elijah, they are "very jealous for "the Lord of hosts." They feel their obligations to him, and know he well deserves to reign in every heart. But when, on the contrary, they see almost every one in a conspiracy against him, despising him to his face, trampling upon his laws, rejecting his authority, and abusing his patience; their eyes affect their hearts. What man of sensibility could brook to see every one about him contriving how to affront and injure the person whom he most loved? Now the Lord is the believer's best friend, the beloved of his soul: and therefore he is *grieved* and troubled when he "beholds the trans-"gressors."

This emotion is likewise heightened by compassion to souls. Grace gives some view of the evil of sin, the dreadfulness of the wrath of God, and the vast importance of that word ETERNITY. Thus instructed in the

sanctuary of God, they would be stocks and stones, were they capable of beholding sinners rushing upon destruction, without being grieved for them. But they cannot bear it. They cannot but give and repeat a faithful warning, though they have little reason to expect any better return than scorn and ill treatment, for what the world accounts an impertinent officiousness.

But who then are *believers?* Who are thus " on the " Lord's side?" If these sentiments are common and radical to all who are born of God, can we make no abatement? or must we unchristian perhaps the greater part of professors at this time? for it is too evident, that many who bear the name of Gospel-professors, discover but little of this concern. In general, I think, this subject affords no improper *test* for the trial of our spirits. The effects of grace, in similar circumstances, are uniform; but if any, who think themselves possessors of it, feel no grief for the aboundings of sin, and the obstinacy of sinners, they differ from the saints recorded both in the Old and New Testament; and it will be their wisdom to examine and take heed lest they be deceived. It is easy to call Christ, Lord, Lord; but a criminal lukewarmness of spirit, where his cause, honour, and Gospel are in question, will one day meet with an awful rebuke, and be treated, in those who make mention of his name, as high treason against his person and government.

But if we allow, that, through the contagion of the times, and the power of Satan, it is possible for true Christians to sink into this indifference, and for the wise as well as the foolish virgins to sleep, when they should be watching unto prayer; even these have much to fear, lest they should largely participate in the sufferings which the provocations they connive at have a direct

tendency to bring upon a sinful people. When national sins draw down national judgments, the Lord has given us a hope, that he will fix a mark of *protection* upon them who *sigh* and *mourn* in secret before him, for the evils which they are unable to prevent. To these he will be a sanctuary; he will either preserve them unhurt, in the midst of surrounding calamities, or he will support them with consolations superior to all their troubles, when the hearts of others are shaken like leaves in a storm. But none have reason to expect to be thus privileged, who have not a heart given them to *lament* their own sins, and the sins of those among whom they live.

Surely the Lord has a controversy with this land; and there hardly can a period be assigned in the annals of ages, when it was more expedient, or seasonable, for those who fear him, to stir up each other to humiliation and prayer, than at present. What is commonly called our *national debt*, is swelled to an *enormous greatness*. It may be quickly expressed in figures; but a person must be something versed in calculation, to form a tolerable idea of accumulated millions. But what arithmetic is sufficient to compute the immensity of our national debt in a *spiritual* sense? or, in other words, the amount of our *national sins?* The spirit of infidelity, which for a time distinguished, comparatively, a few, and, like a river, was restrained within narrow bounds, has of late years broken down its banks, and deluged the land. This wide-spreading evil has, in innumerable instances, as might be expected, emboldened the natural heart against the fear of God, hardened it to an insensibility of moral obligation, and strengthened its prejudices against the Gospel. The consequence has been, that profligate wickedness has become almost as

universal as the air we breathe; and is practised with little more reserve or secrecy than the transactions of common business, except in such instances as would subject the offender to the penalty of human laws. O the unspeakable patience of God! The multiplied instances of impiety, blasphemy, cruelty, adultery, villany, and abominations, not to be thought of without horror, under which this land groans, are only known to him who knoweth all things. There are few sins which imply greater contempt of God, or a more obdurate state of mind in the offender, than *perjury;* yet the guilt of it is so little regarded, and temptations to it so very frequent, that perhaps I do not go too far in supposing, there are more deliberate acts of perjury committed amongst us, than among all the rest of mankind taken together. Though some of the Roman poets and historians have given very dark pictures of the times they lived in, their worst descriptions of this kind would hardly be found exaggerated, if applied to our own.—But what are the sins of Heathens, if compared with the like evils, perpetrated in a land bearing the name of Christian, favoured with the word of God, the light of the Gospel, and enjoying the blessings of civil and religious liberty and peace, in a higher degree, and for a longer continuance, than was afforded to any people of whose history we have heard?

The state of the churches of Christ at this time affords likewise ample cause for humiliation and grief. The formality, conformity to the world, the want of love, the intemperate and unprofitable contentions, which prevail among us, show how faintly the power of the Gospel is felt, even by many who profess to have embraced it. The true and undefiled doctrine of Jesus is not only *opposed* by its declared enemies, but *wounded*

and *dishonoured* in the house of its friends. And though the sins of those who avow subjection to the institutions of Christ, may not have so gross a stamp of profligacy and immorality, as of those who set him openly at defiance; yet they have, in some respects, an aggravation, of which the others are not capable; as being committed against clearer light, and peculiar acknowledged obligations. From the consideration of both taken together, who, that has a spark of seriousness and attention, and that has learned from Scripture and history the sure connexion between sin and trouble, can forbear trembling at that alarming question, so often proposed to the consciences of ungrateful Israel of old, "Shall not "I VISIT for these things? saith the Lord: and shall "not my soul be AVENGED on such a nation as this?" Especially when we see the dispensations of God's providence so awfully corresponding with the threatenings in his word.

How much is it to be desired, then, that all who truly fear the Lord, instead of wasting their time in useless squabbles, may unite in earnest *prayer;* and, with deep compunction of heart, bemoan those evils which, unless repented of and forsaken, may bring upon us, as a people, such distress as neither we nor our fathers have known! If he is pleased thus to give us a heart to seek him, he will yet be found of us; but if, when his hand is lifted up, we cannot or will not see, nor regard the *signs of the times*, there is great reason to fear that our case is deplorable indeed.

A few, however, there will be, who will lay these things suitably to heart; and whom the Lord will favour and spare, as a man spareth his only son that serveth him. That you and I may be of this happy number, is the sincere prayer of, &c.

LETTER XL.

A Word to Professors in Trade.

Dear Sir,

IT is suspected, (or rather it is too certainly known,) that among those who are deemed Gospel-professors, there are some persons who allow themselves in the practice of dealing in prohibited, uncustomed, or, (as the common phrase is,) *smuggled* goods, to the prejudice of the public revenue, and the detriment of the fair trader.

The decisions of the word of God, upon this point, are so plain and determinate, that it is rather difficult to conceive how a sincere mind can either overlook or mistake them. The same authority which forbids us to commit *adultery*, or *murder*, requires us to "render unto "Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's;" to render unto all their dues, *tribute* to whom tribute, *custom* to whom custom. These precepts enjoin no more than what the common sense of mankind pronounces to be due from subjects and members of society, to the governments they live under, and by which they are protected. But the obligation is greatly enforced upon those who acknowledge themselves the disciples of Christ, since he has been pleased to make their compliance herein a part of the obedience they owe to himself. And it is plain, that these injunctions are universal and binding, under all civil governments, as such; for none can justly suppose, that tributes exacted by the Roman emperors, (under whose dominion the first Christians lived,) such as Tibe-

rius or Nero, had the sanction of our Lord and his apostles on account of their peculiar equity.

The vending smuggled goods, or the buying them, if known to be so, is likewise injurious to the fair trader, who, conscientiously paying the prescribed duties, cannot afford to sell so cheap as the smuggler; and therefore must expect the fewer customers. In this view, it offends the royal law, of "doing to others as we would "they should do unto us." The force of this argument may be easily felt by any one who will honestly make the case his own. Without any nice reasoning, people may know in a moment, that they should not like to be put to this disadvantage. It is therefore unjust (*i. e.* sinful, and utterly unbecoming a professor of religion,) to purchase smuggled goods, even in small quantities and for family-use. As for those who, being in trade themselves, make this practice a branch of their business, and, under the semblance of a fair reputation, are doing things in secret which they would tremble to have discovered, being afraid of the exchequer, though not of God;—I can only pray, that God may give them repentance; for it is a work of darkness, and needs it. Transactions of this kind cannot be carried on for a course of time without such a series and complication of fraud and meanness*, and for the most part of perjury likewise, as would be scandalous, not only in a professed Christian, but in an avowed infidel.

It should be observed likewise, that there is hardly any set of men more lost to society, or in a situation more dangerous to themselves and others, than the people who are called *smugglers*. Frequent fightings, and

* Dr. Johnson, defining a smuggler, says, he is "*a wretch* who imports "or exports goods without payment of the customs."

sometimes *murder* itself, are the consequence of their illicit commerce. Their money is ill gotten, and it is generally ill spent. They are greatly to be pitied. The employment they are accustomed to has a direct tendency to deprive them of character, and the privileges of social life, and to harden their hearts and stupify their consciences, in the ways of sin. But for whom are they risking their lives, and ruining their souls? I would hope, reader, not for *you*, if you account yourself a Christian. If you, for the sake of gain, encourage and assist them, by buying or selling their goods, you are so far responsible for the consequences. You encourage them in sin; you expose them to mischief. And have you so learned Christ? Is this the testimony you give of the uprightness of your hearts and ways? Is it thus you show your compassion for the souls of men? Ah! shake your hands from gain so dearly earned.—Think not to support the cause of God with such gain: he hates robbery for burnt-offering. Think it not lawful, or safe, to put a farthing of it into your treasury, lest it secretly communicate a moth and a curse to all that you possess; for it is the price of blood, the blood of souls. If you are indeed a child of God, and will persist in this path after admonition received, be assured your sin will find you out. If the Lord loves you he will not suffer you to prosper in your perverseness. You may rather expect, that as a little damaged corn is sufficient to spoil the whole heap to which it is laid, so money thus obtained will deprive you of the blessing and comfort you might otherwise expect from your lawful acquisitions.

If you are determined to persist, in opposition to Scripture, to law, to equity and humanity, you have doubtless, as I suppose you a professor, some plea or excuse

with which you attempt to justify yourself, and to keep your conscience quiet. See to it, that it be such a one as will bear the examination of a *dying* hour. You will not surely plead, that "things are come to such a pass, "there is no carrying on business upon other terms to "advantage!" Will the practice of the world, who know not Christ, be a proper precedent for you, who call yourself by his name? That cannot be, since his command is, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to "do evil." That the truth and power of his grace may be manifested, he is pleased to put his servants into such situations, that they must forego some seeming advantages, and suffer some seeming hardships, in their worldly connexions, if they will approve themselves faithful to him, and live in the exercise of a good conscience. He promises, that his grace shall be sufficient for them. It is the *blessing* of the Lord that maketh *rich;* and, for want of this, we see many rise early, take late rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, to no purpose. And I believe, *integrity* and *diligence* in business, with a humble *dependence* upon his PROVIDENCE, are the best methods of thriving even in temporals. However, they who lose *for* him are in no danger of losing *by* him. They may be confident of so much as he sees best for them; and they shall have his peace and blessing with it. But if, when you are placed in a state of trial, the love of the world is so powerful in your heart, that you cannot resist the temptation of enriching yourself by unlawful means, you have great reason to fear you have not his Spirit, and are therefore none of his.

I am, &c.

LETTER XLI.

On the Ministry of Angels.

Dear Sir,

THE saints on earth, though exposed to many sufferings, and assaulted by many enemies, are as *safe* as the saints in glory. They have been enabled, in the day of God's power, to commit themselves to the care of Jesus, the great shepherd; who is *faithful* to his trust, and *able* to save them to the uttermost. His eye is always upon them; his everlasting arms are underneath them; and no power, or policy, can separate them from his love.

The apostle, in the name and behalf of the church militant, having taken a leisurely and distinct survey of all the difficulties and opposition they can possibly meet with, in life or in death, from the visible or invisible worlds; triumphs in an assurance, that *none* of these things *singly*, nor *all* of them *together*, shall prevail; but that, on the contrary, believers shall be made conquerors, yea, more than conquerors, through Him who has loved them.

In the course of his enumeration of the real or supposed dangers to which the people of Christ are exposed, he particularly mentions, *angels*, *principalities*, and *powers;* intimating to us a subject of great importance, though too seldom and too faintly attended to by us; I mean the part which the inhabitants of the unseen world take in our concerns. *Angels* is a general name; the terms *principalities* and *powers*, and elsewhere *thrones* and *dominions*, applied to them, we shall not perhaps

clearly understand, till we mingle with the world of spirits. These different names seem, however, to imply, that some difference of degree, and possibly some subordination of rule, obtains among them. But they shall not be able, either singly or collectively, to separate believers from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

The general distribution of angels, principalities, and powers, is into *good* and *evil*. They were all created glorious and excellent creatures; for nothing but good could originally proceed from God, the fountain of goodness. But some of them "kept not their first "estate." Sin despoiled them of their glory, and changed them from angels of light into powers of darkness. And though they have a permissive liberty, subservient to the limitations and designs of divine wisdom, to influence the *minds*, and to interfere in the *affairs*, of mankind; yet they are *confined* in chains of darkness which they cannot break, and are *reserved* to the judgment of the great day.

There are likewise an innumerable company of *elect* or *good* angels, Rev. iii. 11. who were *preserved* by sovereign grace, and are now *established*, (together with believers,) in CHRIST JESUS, the great Head of the whole family of God, in heaven and in earth. From these, we may be sure, believers have nothing to fear. They are our *brethren* and *fellow-servants*. They join in the song of the redeemed before the throne; and rejoice in the conversion of a sinner upon earth. We cannot include these in the apostle's challenge, any further than by way of supposition; as he expresses himself upon another occasion, Gal. i. 8. It is not possible that an angel from heaven should preach, if he came to preach, any other Gospel than that which is revealed in Scripture; but if such a thing could be supposed, we

ought not to regard him. So it is not to be thought that the elect angels of God should wish to hinder the salvation of a sinner. But if you conceive, for a moment, that any or all of them could form such a design, they would not be able to succeed: for they are all subject to "HIM who loved us, and washed us from "our sins in his own blood." So far, however, are the holy angels from designing us harm, that they are greatly instrumental in promoting our good. They are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs "of salvation;" and they rejoice in the service, and account it their honour to be thus employed.

I propose, in this paper, briefly to consider the ministry of GOOD angels; and may perhaps hereafter offer a few thoughts on the influence and interference of EVIL angels, who are continually labouring to disturb and trouble those whom they are not permitted to destroy. And I shall not attempt to amuse the reader with new and strange conjectures upon these subjects, or to intrude into those things which are not revealed, but shall confine myself to the express declarations of the word of God.

The great God *works* ALL *in* ALL *in both worlds.* It is he who filleth the earth with good things, causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and provides corn for the food of man. But in thus spreading a table for us, he makes use of *instruments.* He commands his sun to shine, and his rain to descend. So he is the life, strength, and comfort, of the renewed soul. All the streams of grace flow from Christ, the fountain. But, from the analogy observable in his works, we might reasonably suppose, that, on many occasions, he is pleased to use means and instruments, and particularly the ministry of his angels, to communicate good to his children. Scrip-

ture expressly confirms this inference, and leaves it no longer a point of mere conjecture. He *gives his angels charge* over them, and they *encamp* round about them that fear him. In this way honour is given to Jesus, as the Lord both of angels and men; and a sweet intercourse is kept up between the different parts of the household of God. That angels have been thus employed in fact, is plain from the history both of the Old and New Testament. They have often made themselves *visible*, when sent to declare the will of God, as to Jacob, Elijah, and David. Gabriel appeared to Zacharias and Mary; and a multitude joined in ascribing "glory to God in the highest," when they brought to the shepherds the joyful news of a Saviour's birth. An angel delivered Peter from prison, and comforted Paul when tossed by a tempest upon the seas. How far the *sensible* ministration of angels is continued in these days, is not easy to determine. Many persons have been imposed upon by Satan, through such expectations; and it is not safe to look for extraordinary things: yet I do not know that we have warrant from Scripture to limit the Lord, so far as to affirm, that he doth not, nor ever will, upon any occasion permit his angels to be *seen* by men, as in former times. The apostle, pressing believers to exercise hospitality, uses this argument, that, "thereby some have entertained "angels unawares;" which would hardly seem to be a pertinent motive, if it were absolutely certain that angels would *never* offer themselves as visitants to the servants of God in future times, as they had formerly done.—But, waving speculations as to their visible appearance, it is sufficient to know, that they are *really*, though invisibly, near us, and mindful of us.

May we not receive assistance from the angels in our

spiritual warfare? That evil angels have an influence and power to distress and disquiet us, is well known to exercised souls. And it seems quite reasonable to believe, that the good angels are as willing, and as able, to communicate *helpful* and encouraging impressions. As it is not always easy to distinguish between the temptations of Satan and the workings of our own evil hearts; so it may be equally or more difficult to distinguish these assistances from the effects of gracious principles abiding in us, or from the leadings and motions of the Holy Spirit. Nor need we be anxious about it. We cannot err in ascribing all to the Lord. Yet there is something cheering in the thought, that we are accompanied and surrounded by these blessed spirits, who have both inclination and ability to relieve, strengthen, and admonish us, in ways which we cannot fully understand. Who can tell how often, and how seasonably, a promise, a caution, a direction from, or agreeable to the word of God, is darted upon our minds by these kind messengers of our Father's love?

We may warrantably think, they are employed in restraining, over-ruling, and controlling, the designs of Satan and his angels. The power, malice, and subtlety of our enemy, are very great. We may learn what he *would* do to us all, if he could, from the instance of Job. But the Lord rebukes him, and that most probably by the ministry of unfallen angels, who are said to encamp round his people, to deliver them; and doubtless their care is especially employed where the greatest danger lies. Much to this purpose seems to be implied in the following passages, Dan. x. 13. Rev. xii. 7. Jude 9.

They are witnesses to the sufferings and to the worship of his people, 1 Cor. iv. 9. Though they do not show themselves to us, as heretofore to Peter or Paul,

they are still near, and attentive; are interested in the conflicts, and rejoice in the victories, of a poor believer. They are present likewise in our solemn assemblies; therefore the apostle charges Timothy, as "before the "elect angels;" and seems to refer to them in 1 Cor. xi. 10. This reflection should enliven and regulate our thoughts when we come together: for though the presence of our Lord and Saviour is the great consideration, yet this likewise may, in its proper place, have some influence to compose our behaviour, Heb. xii. 22.

The ministry of angels preserves us from innumerable dangers and alarms which await us in our daily path. This is expressly taught in Psalm xci. When we receive little or no harm from a fall, or when a sudden motion of our minds leads us to avoid a danger which we were not aware of, perhaps the angels of God have been the means of our preservation; nay, it may be owing to their good offices that we ever perform a journey in safety or are preserved from the evils we are liable to when sleeping upon our beds, and incapable of taking any care of ourselves.

Finally, they are appointed to attend the saints in their last hours; and, in a manner beyond our present apprehension, to keep off the powers of darkness, and bear the children of God safely home to their Father's house, Luke xvi. 22.

The limits of a sheet will not admit of enlargement upon these particulars. The subject is pleasing and comfortable, and well suited to encourage believers under two very common trials.

1. We are often cast down to think how few there are who worship God in spirit and in truth; and are ready to complain, with Elijah, that we are almost left to serve him alone. But Jesus is not slighted and despised in

yonder world as he is in this. If, like the servant of Elisha, our eyes were supernaturally opened, to take a glance within the vail, what a glorious and astonishing prospect would the innumerable host of angels afford us! Then we should be convinced, that, far from being alone, there are unspeakably more for us than against us. Faith supplies the want of sight; is the evidence of things not seen; and, upon the authority of the word of God, is as well satisfied of their existence and employment, as if they were actually in our view.

Again, 2. Many of the Lord's people are tempted to think themselves neglected by their fellow Christians, because they are poor: a discouragement for which there is often too much occasion given. But, poor believer, be not greatly distressed upon this account. If your brethren upon earth are too prone to slight you, your heavenly friends are not so proud and foolish. The angels will attend and assist you, though you live in a poor mud-walled cottage, as willingly as if you were lodged in the palace of a king. They are not affected, one way or the other, with those trivial distinctions which are so apt to bias the judgment and regard of mortals.

May we take a pattern from the angels! Their whole desire is, to fulfil the will of God; and they account no service mean in which he is pleased to employ them; otherwise, great and holy as they are, they might disdain to wait upon sinful worms. Our vanity prompts us to aim at something great, and to wish for such services as might make us known, talked of, and regarded. But a child of God, if in the way of duty, and in the place which the Lord's providence has allotted him, is well employed, though he should have no higher service than to sweep the streets; provided he does it humbly, thank-

fully, and heartily, as to the Lord. An angel, so placed, could do no more.

This paper will doubtlessly fall into the hands of some who are not believers, but are spending their days in sin. With a word to such as these, I would conclude. To you this is but a dark subject. You have reason to be alarmed: for, be assured, the whole host of heaven is against you, while they consider you in a state of rebellion against their Lord. They burn with an holy zeal to avenge his cause; and only wait his command to smite *you*, as one of them smote Herod, for *not giving glory to God.* Pray for faith and repentance. If you believe in Jesus, and turn from your evil ways, the angels will love you, rejoice over you, watch over you, fight for you, and at last convey you into his glorious presence.

I am, &c.

March 5, 1777.

CARDIPHONIA;

OR,

THE UTTERANCE OF THE HEART,

IN THE COURSE OF

A REAL CORRESPONDENCE.

Hæc res et jungit, junctos et servat amicos.
HOR. Lib. i. Sat. 3.

As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.
PROV. xxvii. 19.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE deference due to the Public seems to require an apology for committing letters of private correspondence to the press, while the writer is yet living. He is sensible that sending them abroad without his name prefixed, will not of itself be sufficient to obviate the charge of egotism. The manner of expression and thinking, where an author has been repeatedly in print, will mark him out to good judges when they see him again, so as to render any further description unnecessary.

The solicitation of friends, though a trite, is not always an improper plea, and would probably in the present case be admitted, if he had not determined to conceal the names of his correspondents likewise, and to suppress, as far as possible, every circumstance which might lead to discover them. For they certainly did recommend the publication, and return him their letters purposely that a selection might be made. But as he does not think himself at liberty to declare them, he must forego the advantage of screening himself under the sanction of their judgment.

Posthumous letters are usually published to disadvantage. If it be supposed that the author has friends whose regard to his memory will make them willing to purchase what appears under his name, that circumstance has sometimes given occasion to an indiscriminate and injudicious publication of letters collected from all quarters, in which more attention is paid to the bulk than the value. For amongst a number of letters written to intimate friends, some will be too trivial to deserve notice, and others may be so intermingled with details of private or domestic concerns, as perhaps

to give pain to those who are interested in them, when they see them in print. The writer of the following letters thought himself more competent to decide at present, which and how much of the papers before him might be not utterly unworthy of being preserved, than a stranger could be after his decease.

Further, he finds that between an increase of engagements on the one hand, and the unavoidable effects of advancing years on the other, he can expect but little leisure or ability for writing letters in future, except upon necessary business. By this method of sending to each of his correspondents many letters at once, he takes leave of them with the less regret, persuaded that he thus communicates the substance of all he could offer, if he was able to write to them severally as often and as much at large as in times past.

Though some attention has been paid to variety, it was not practicable wholly to avoid what may be thought repetition, without destroying the texture and connexion of many letters; particularly in those which treat of affliction. But where the same subject recurs, it is usually placed in something of a different point of view, or illustrated in a different manner.

Thus much to bespeak the reader's favourable and candid perusal of what is now put into his hands. But the writer stands before a higher tribunal; and would be much to be pitied, if he were not conscious, that in this publication he has no allowed aims, but to be subservient to the gracious designs of God by the Gospel, and to promote the good of his fellow-creatures.

November 29, 1780.

TWENTY-SIX LETTERS

TO

A NOBLEMAN.

LETTER I.

My Lord, March—1765.

I REMEMBER, when I once had the pleasure of waiting on you, you were pleased to begin an interesting conversation, which, to my concern, was interrupted. The subject was concerning the causes, nature, and marks of a decline in grace; how it happens that we lose that warm impression of divine things, which in some favoured moments we think it almost impossible to forget; how far this change of frame is consistent with a spiritual growth in other respects; how to form a comparative judgment of our proficiency upon the whole; and by what steps the losses we sustain from our necessary connexion with a sinful nature and a sinful world, may be retrieved from time to time. I beg your Lordship's permission to fill up the paper with a view to these inquiries. I do not mean to offer a laboured essay on them, but such thoughts as shall occur while the pen is in my hand.

The awakened soul, (especially when, after a season of distress and terror, it begins to taste that the Lord is gracious,) finds itself as in a new world. No change in outward life can be so sensible, so affecting. No wonder, then, that at such a time little else can be thought of; the transition from darkness to light, from a sense of wrath to a hope of glory, is the greatest that can be imagined, and is oftentimes as sudden as wonderful.

Hence the general characteristics of young converts are zeal and love. Like Israel at the Red Sea, they have just seen the wonderful works of the Lord, and they cannot but sing his praise; they are deeply affected with the danger they have lately escaped, and with the case of multitudes around them, who are secure and careless in the same alarming situation! and a sense of their own mercies, and a compassion for the souls of others, is so transporting that they can hardly forbear preaching to every one they meet.

This emotion is highly just and reasonable, with respect to the causes from whence it springs; and it is doubtless a proof, not only of the imperfection, but the depravity of our nature, that we are not always thus affected; yet it is not entirely genuine. If we examine this character closely, which seems at first sight a pattern and a reproof to Christians of longer standing, we shall for the most part find it attended with considerable defects.

1. Such persons are very weak in faith. Their confidence arises rather from the lively impressions of joy within, than from a distinct and clear apprehension of the work of God in Christ. The comforts which are intended as *cordials* to animate them against the opposition of an unbelieving world, they mistake and rest in as the *proper evidences* of their hope. And hence it comes to pass, that when the Lord varies his dispensations, and hides his face, they are soon troubled and at their wit's end.

2. They who are in this state of their first love, are seldom free from something of a censorious spirit. They have not yet felt all the deceitfulness of their own hearts; they are not well acquainted with the devices or temptations of Satan; and therefore know not how to sympathize or make allowances, where allowances are ne-

cessary and due, and can hardly bear with any who do not discover the same earnestness as themselves.

3. They are likewise, more or less under the influence of self righteousness and self-will. They mean well; but not being as yet well acquainted with the spiritual meaning and proper use of the law, nor established in the life of faith, a part, (oftentimes a very considerable part,) of their zeal spends itself in externals and non-essentials, prompts them to practise what is not commanded, to refrain from what is lawful, and to observe various and needless austerities and singularities, as their tempers and circumstances differ.

However, with all their faults, methinks there is something very beautiful and engaging in the honest vehemence of a young convert Some cold and rigid judges are ready to reject these promising appearances on account of incidental blemishes. But would a gardener throw away a fine nectarine, because it is *green*, and has not yet attained all that beauty and flavour which a few more showers and suns will impart? Perhaps it will hold for the most part in grace as in nature, (some exceptions there are,) if there is not some *fire* in youth, we can hardly expect a proper warmth in old age.

But the great and good Husbandman watches over what his own hand has planted, and carries on his work by a variety of different and even contrary dispensations. While their mountain stands thus strong, they think they shall never be moved; but at length they find a change. Sometimes it comes on by insensible degrees. That part of their affection which was purely natural, will abate of course when the power of novelty ceases: they will begin, in some instances, to perceive their own indiscretions; and an endeavour to correct the excesses of an imprudent zeal will often draw them

towards the contrary extreme of remissness: the evils of their hearts, which, though overpowered, were not eradicated, will revive again: the enemy will watch his occasions to meet them with suitable temptations; and as it is the Lord's design that they should experimentally learn and feel their own weakness, he will in some instances be permitted to succeed. When guilt is thus brought upon the conscience, the heart grows hard, the hands feeble, and the knees weak; then confidence is shaken, the spirit of prayer interrupted, the armour gone, and thus things grow worse and worse, till the Lord is pleased to interpose: for though we can fall of ourselves, we cannot rise without his help. Indeed every sin, in its own nature, has a tendency towards a final apostacy; but there is a provision in the covenant of grace, and the Lord, in his own time, returns to convince, humble, pardon, comfort, and renew the soul. He touches the rock, and the waters flow. By repeated experiments and exercises of this sort, (for this wisdom is seldom acquired by one or a few lessons,) we begin at length to learn that we are nothing, have nothing, can do nothing but sin. And thus we are gradually prepared to live more out of ourselves, and to derive all our sufficiency of every kind from Jesus, the fountain of grace. We learn to tread more warily, to trust less to our own strength, to have lower thoughts of ourselves, and higher thoughts of *him:* in which two last particulars, I apprehend what the Scripture means by a growth of grace does properly consist. Both are increasing in the lively Christian;—every day shows him more of his own heart, and more of the power, sufficiency, compassion, and grace of his adorable Redeemer; but neither will be complete till we get to heaven.

I apprehend, therefore, that though we find an abate-

ment of that sensible warmth of affection which we felt at first setting out; yet if our views are more evangelical, our judgment more ripened, our hearts more habitually humbled under a sense of inward depravity, our tempers more softened into sympathy and tenderness; if our prevailing desires are spiritual, and we practically esteem the precepts, ordinances, and people of God; we may warrantably conclude, that his good work of grace in us is, upon the whole, on an increase.

But still it is to be lamented, that an increase of knowledge and experience should be so generally attended with a decline of fervour. If it was not for what has passed in my own heart, I should be ready to think it impossible. But this very circumstance gives me a still more emphatical conviction of my own vileness and depravity. The want of humiliation humbles me, and my very indifference rouses and awakens me to earnestness. There are, however, seasons of refreshment, ineffable glances of light and power upon the soul, which, as they are derived from clearer displays of divine grace, if not so tumultuous as the first joys, are more penetrating, transforming, and animating. A glance of these, when compared with our sluggish stupidity when they are withheld, weans the heart from this wretched state of sin and temptation, and makes the thoughts of death and eternity desirable. Then this conflict shall cease; I shall sin and wander no more, see him as he is, and be like him for ever.

If the question is, How are these bright moments to be prolonged, renewed, or retrieved? we are directed to faith and diligence. A careful use of the appointed means of grace, a watchful endeavour to avoid the occasions and appearances of evil, and especially assiduity in secret prayer, will bring us as much of them as the

Lord sees good for us. He knows best why we are not to be trusted with them continually. Here we are to walk by faith, to be exercised and tried; by and by we shall be crowned, and the desires he has given shall be abundantly satisfied.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

My Lord, April—1766.

I SHALL embrace your permission to fill my paper. —As to subject, that which has been a frequent theme of my heart of late, I shall venture to lay before your Lordship,—I mean the remarkable and humbling difference which I suppose all who know themselves may observe, between their acquired and their experimental knowledge, or in other words, between their judgment and their practice. To hear a believer speak his apprehensions of the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, the love of Christ, the beauty of holiness, or the importance of eternity, who would not suppose him proof against temptation? To hear with what strong arguments he can recommend watchfulness, prayer, forbearance, and submission, when he is teaching or advising others, who would not suppose but he could also teach himself, and influence his own conduct? Yet, alas!—*Quam dispar sibi!* The person who rose from his knees before he left his chamber a poor, indigent, fallible, dependent creature, who saw and acknowledged that he was unworthy to breathe the air or to see the light, may meet with many occasions before the day is closed, to discover the corruptions of his heart, and to show how weak and faint his best principles and clearest

convictions are in their actual exercise. And in this view, how vain is man! what a contradiction is a believer to himself! He is called a *Believer* emphatically, because he cordially assents to the word of God; but, alas! how often unworthy of the name! If I was to describe him from the Scripture-character, I should say, he is one whose heart is athirst for God, for his glory, his image, his presence: his affections are fixed upon an unseen Saviour; his treasures, and consequently his thoughts, are on high, beyond the bounds of sense. Having experienced much forgiveness, he is full of bowels of mercy to all around; and having been often deceived by his own heart, he dares trust it no more, but lives by faith in the Son of God, for wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, and derives from him grace for grace; sensible that without him he has not sufficiency even to think a good thought. In short—He is dead to the world, to sin, to self, but alive to God, and lively in his service. Prayer is his breath, the word of God his food, and the ordinances more precious to him than the light of the sun. Such is a believer—in his judgment and prevailing desires.

But was I to describe him from experience, especially at some times, how different would the picture be? Though he knows that communion with God is his highest privilege, he too seldom finds it so; on the contrary, if duty, conscience, and necessity did not compel, he would leave the throne of grace unvisited from day to day. He takes up the Bible, conscious that it is the fountain of life and true comfort; yet perhaps while he is making the reflection, he feels a secret distaste, which prompts him to lay it down, and give his preference to a newspaper. He needs not to be told of the vanity and uncertainty of all beneath the sun; and yet is al-

most as much elated or cast down by a trifle, as those who have their portion in this world. He believes that all things shall work together for his good, and that the most high God appoints, adjusts, and over-rules all his concerns; yet he feels the risings of fear, anxiety, and displeasure, as though the contrary was true. He owns himself ignorant, and liable to be deceived by a thousand fallacies; yet is easily betrayed into positiveness, and self-conceit. He feels himself an unprofitable, unfaithful, unthankful servant, and therefore blushes to harbour a thought of desiring the esteem and commendations of men, yet he cannot suppress it. Finally, (for I must observe some bounds,) on account of these and many other inconsistencies, he is struck dumb before the Lord, stripped of every hope and plea, but what is provided in the free grace of God, and yet his heart is continually leaning and returning to a covenant of works.

Two questions naturally arise from such a view of ourselves. First,—How can these things be, or why are they permitted? Since the Lord hates sin, teaches his people to hate it and cry against it, and has promised to hear their prayers, how is it that they go thus burdened? surely if he could not, or would not, overrule evil for good, he would not permit it to continue. By these exercises he teaches us more truly to know and feel the utter depravity and corruption of our whole nature, that we are indeed defiled in every part. His method of salvation is likewise hereby exceedingly endeared to us; we see that it is and must be of grace, wholly of grace; and that the Lord Jesus Christ, and his perfect righteousness, is and must be our all in all. His power likewise in maintaining his own work, notwithstanding our infirmities, temptations, and enemies.

is hereby displayed in the clearest light, his strength is manifested in our weakness. Satan likewise is more remarkably disappointed and put to shame, when he finds bounds set to his rage and policy, beyond which he cannot pass; and that those in whom he finds so much to work upon, and over whom he so often prevails for a season, escape at last out of his hands. He casts them down, but they are raised again; he wounds them, but they are healed: he obtains his desire to sift them as wheat, but the prayer of their great Advocate prevails for the maintenance of their faith. Further, by what believers feel in themselves, they learn by degrees how to warn, pity, and bear with others. A soft, patient, and compassionate spirit, and a readiness and skill in comforting those who are cast down, is not perhaps attainable in any other way. And lastly, I believe nothing more habitually reconciles a child of God to the thought of death, than the wearisomeness of this warfare. Death is unwelcome to nature;—but then, and not till then, the conflict will cease. Then we shall sin no more. The flesh, with all its attendant evils, will be laid in the grave;—then the soul, which has been partaker of a new and heavenly birth, shall be freed from every incumbrance, and stand perfect in the Redeemer's righteousness before God in glory.

But though these evils cannot be wholly removed, it is worth while to inquire, Secondly, How they may be mitigated? This we are encouraged to hope for. The word of God directs and animates to a growth in grace: and though we can do nothing spiritually of ourselves, yet there is a part assigned us. We cannot conquer the obstacles in our way by our own strength; yet we *can* give way to them; and if we do, it is our sin, and will be our sorrow. The disputes concerning inherent

power in the creature, have been carried to inconvenient lengths; for my own part, I think it safe to use Scriptural language. The apostles exhort us, to give all diligence, to resist the devil, to purge ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, to give ourselves to reading, meditation, and prayer; to watch, to put on the whole armour of God, and to abstain from all appearance of evil. Faithfulness to light received, and a sincere endeavour to conform to the means prescribed in the word of God, with an humble application to the blood of sprinkling, and the promised Spirit, will undoubtedly be answered by increasing measures of light, faith, strength, and comfort; and we shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord.

I need not tell your Lordship that I am an extempore writer. I dropped the consideration of whom I was addressing from the first paragraph: but I now return and subscribe myself, with the greatest deference, &c.

LETTER III.

My Lord, April—1770.

I HAVE a desire to fill the paper, and must therefore betake myself to the expedient I lately mentioned.—Glorious things are spoken of the city of God, or, (as I suppose,) the state of glory, in Rev. xxi. from verse 10. *ad finem.* The description is doubtless mystical, and perhaps nothing short of a happy experience and participation will furnish an adequate exposition. One expression, in particular, has I believe puzzled wiser heads than mine to explain. *The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.* The construction

likewise in the Greek is difficult. Some render it *pure gold transparent as glass;* this is the sense, but then it should be neuter, διαφανες, to agree with χρυσιον. If our reading is right, we must understand it either of *gold pure*, bright, and perspicuous as the finest transparent glass, (for all glass is not transparent,) or else, as two distinct comparisons, splendid and durable as the purest gold, clear and transparent as the finest glass. In that happy world the beauties and advantages which here are divided and incompatible, will unite and agree. Our glass is clear, but brittle; our gold is shining and solid, but it is opaque, and discovers only a surface. And thus it is with our minds. The powers of the imagination are lively and extensive, but transient and uncertain. The powers of the understanding are more solid and regular, but at the same time more slow and limited, and confined to the outside properties of the few objects around us. But when we arrive within the vail, the perfections of the glass and the gold will be combined, and the imperfections of each will entirely cease. Then we shall *know* more than we can now imagine. *The glass will be all gold.* And then we shall apprehend Truth in its relations and consequences, not, (as at present,) by that tedious and fallible process which we call Reasoning, but by a single glance of thought, as the sight pierces in an instant through the largest transparent body. *The gold will be all glass.*

I do not offer this as the sense of the passage, but as a thought which once occurred to me while reading it. I daily groan under a desultory ungovernable imagination, and a palpable darkness of understanding, which greatly impede me in my attempts to contemplate the truths of God. Perhaps these complaints, in a greater or less degree, are common to all our fallen race, and

exhibit mournful proofs that our nature is essentially depraved. The grace of God affords some assistance for correcting the wildness of the fancy, and enlarging the capacity of the mind: yet the cure at present is but palliative; but ere long it shall be perfect, and our complaints shall cease for ever. Now it costs us much pains to acquire a *pittance* of solid and useful knowledge; and the ideas we have collected are far from being at the disposal of judgment, and, like men in a crowd, are perpetually clashing and interfering with each other. But it will not be so, when we are completely freed from the effects of sin. Confusion and darkness will not follow us into the world where light and order reign. Then, and not till then, our knowledge will be perfect, and our possession of it uninterrupted and secure.

Since the radical powers of the soul are thus enfeebled and disordered, it is not to be wondered at that the best of men, and under their highest attainments, have found cause to make the acknowledgment of the apostle, "When I would do good evil is present with "me." But, blessed be God, though we must feel hourly cause for shame and humiliation for what we are in ourselves, we have cause to rejoice continually in Christ Jesus, who, as he is revealed unto us under the various names, characters, relations, and offices, which he bears in the Scripture, holds out to our faith a balm for every wound, a cordial for every discouragement, and a sufficient answer to every objection which sin or Satan can suggest against our peace. If we are guilty, he is our righteousness; if we are sick, he is our infallible physician; if we are weak, helpless, and defenceless, he is the compassionate and faithful Shepherd who has taken charge of us, and will not suffer any thing to

disappoint our hopes, or to separate us from his love. He knows our frame; he remembers that we are but dust; and has engaged to guide us by his counsel, support us by his power, and at length to receive us to his glory, that we may be with him for ever.

I am, with the greatest deference, &c.

LETTER IV.

My Lord, February—1772.

I HAVE been sitting perhaps a quarter of an hour with my pen in my hand, and my finger upon my upper lip, contriving how I should begin my letter.—A detail of the confused incoherent thoughts which have successively passed through my mind, would have more than filled the sheet; but your Lordship's patience, and even your charity for the writer, would have been tried to the uttermost, if I could have penned them all down. At length my suspense reminded me of the apostle's words, Gal. v. 17. "Ye cannot do the things that ye would." This is an humbling but a just account of a Christian's attainments in the present life, and is equally applicable to the strongest and to the weakest. The weakest need not say *less*, the strongest will hardly venture to say *more*. The Lord has given his people a desire and will aiming at great things; without this they would be unworthy the name of Christians; but they cannot do as they would: their best desires are weak and ineffectual, not absolutely so, (for he who works in them to will, enables them in a measure to do likewise,) but in comparison with the mark at which they aim. So that while they have great cause to be thankful for the desire he has given them, and for the degree in which it is answered,

they have equal reason to be ashamed and abased under a sense of their continual defects, and the evil mixtures which taint and debase their best endeavours. It would be easy to make out a long list of particulars which a believer would do if he could, but in which from first to last, he finds a mortifying inability. Permit me to mention a few, which I need not transcribe from books, for they are always present to my mind.

He would willingly enjoy God in prayer :—he knows that prayer is his duty ; but, in his judgment, he considers it likewise as his greatest honour and privilege. In this light he can recommend it to others, and can tell them of the wonderful condescension of the great God, who humbles himself to behold the things that are in heaven, that he should stoop so much lower, to afford his gracious ear to the supplications of sinful worms upon earth. He can bid them expect a pleasure in waiting upon the Lord, different in kind and greater in degree than all that the world can afford. By prayer he can say, You have liberty to cast all your cares upon him that careth for you. By one hour's intimate access to the throne of grace, where the Lord causes his glory to pass before the soul that seeks him, you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort, than by a day or a week's converse with the best of men, or the most studious perusal of many folios : and in this light he would consider it and improve it for himself. But, alas ! how seldom can he do as he would ! How often does he find this privilege a mere task, which he would be glad of a just excuse to omit ? and the chief pleasure he derives from the performance, is to think that his task is finished :—he has been drawing near to God with his lips, while his heart was far from him. Surely this is not doing as he would, when, (to borrow the ex-

pression of an old woman here,) he is dragged before God like a slave, and comes away like a thief.

The like may be said of reading the Scripture. He believes it to be the word of God: he admires the wisdom and grace of the doctrines, the beauty of the precepts, the richness and suitableness of the promises; and therefore, with David, he accounts it preferable to thousands of gold and silver, and sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. Yet while he thus thinks of it, and desires that it may dwell in him richly, and be his meditation night and day, he cannot do as he would. It will require some resolution to persist in reading a portion of it every day; and even then his heart is often less engaged than when reading a pamphlet. Here again his privilege frequently dwindles into a task. His appetite is vitiated, so that he has but little relish for the food of his soul.

He would willingly have abiding, admiring thoughts of the person and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Glad he is, indeed, of those occasions which recall the Saviour to his mind; and with this view, notwithstanding all discouragements, he perseveres in attempting to pray and read, and waits upon the ordinances. Yet he cannot do as he would. Whatever claims he may have to the exercise of gratitude and sensibility towards his fellow-creatures, he must confess himself mournfully ungrateful and insensible towards his best Friend and Benefactor. Ah! what trifles are capable of shutting *him* out of our thoughts, of whom we say, He is the Beloved of our souls, who loved us, and gave himself for us, and whom we have deliberately chosen as our chief good and portion. What can make us amends for the loss we suffer here? Yet surely if we *could*, we *would* set him always

before us; his love should be the delightful theme of our hearts

From morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve.

But though we aim at this good, evil is present with us; we find we are renewed but in part, and have still cause to plead the Lord's promise, To take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh.

He would willingly acquiesce in all the dispensations of Divine Providence. He believes that all events are under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall surely issue in the glory of God and the good of those who fear him. He doubts not but the hairs of his head are all numbered, that the blessings of every kind which he possesses, were bestowed upon him, and are preserved to him, by the bounty and special favour of the Lord whom he serves; that afflictions spring not out of the ground, but are fruits and tokens of Divine love, no less than his comforts;—that there is a need-be, whenever for a season he is in heaviness. Of these principles he can no more doubt, than of what he sees with his eyes, and there are seasons when he thinks they will prove sufficient to reconcile him to the sharpest trials. But often when he aims to apply them in an hour of *present* distress, he cannot do what he would. He feels a law in his members warring against the law in his mind; so that, in defiance of the clearest convictions, seeing as though he perceived not, he is ready to complain, murmur, and despond. Alas! how vain is man in his best estate! How much weakness and inconsistency even in those whose hearts are right with the Lord! and what reason have we to confess that we are unworthy, unprofitable servants!

It were easy to enlarge in this way, would paper and time permit. But blessed be God, we are not under the law, but under grace. And even these distressing effects of the remnants of indwelling sin are over-ruled for good. By these experiences the believer is weaned more from self, and taught more highly to prize and more obsolutely to rely on him, who is appointed unto us of God, Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. The more vile we are in our own eyes, the more precious he will be to us; and a deep repeated sense of the evil of our hearts is necessary to preclude all boasting, and to make us willing to give the whole glory of our salvation where it is due. Again, a sense of these evils will, (when hardly any thing else can do it,) reconcile us to the thoughts of death; yea, make us desirous to depart that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deep rooted in our nature, that, (like the leprous house,) the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement. Then, and not till then, we shall be able to do the thing that we would: when we see Jesus, we shall be transformed into his image, and have done with sin and sorrow for ever.

I am, with great deference, &c.

LETTER V.

My Lord, March—1772

I THINK my last letter turned upon the apostle's thought, Gal. v. 17. "Ye cannot do the things that ye would." In the parallel place, Rom. vii. 19. there is another clause subjoined, "The evil which I would not, "that I do." This, added to the former, would com-

plete the dark side of my experience. Permit me to tell your lordship a little part, (for some things must not, cannot be told,) not of what I have read, but of what I have felt, in illustration of this passage.

I *would not* be the sport and prey of wild, vain, foolish, and worse imaginations; but this evil is present with me; my heart is like a highway, like a city without walls or gates. Nothing so false, so frivolous, so absurd, so impossible, or so horrid, but it can obtain access, and that at any time, or in any place: neither the study, the pulpit, or even the Lord's table, exempt me from their intrusion. I sometimes compare my *words* to the treble of an instrument, which my *thoughts* accompany with a kind of base, or rather anti-base, in which every rule of harmony is broken, every possible combination of discord and confusion is introduced, utterly inconsistent with, and contradictory to, the intended melody. Ah! what music would my praying and preaching often make in the ears of the Lord of Hosts, if he listened to them as they are *mine* only! By men, the upper part only, (if I may so speak,) is heard; and small cause there is for self-gratulation, if *they* should happen to commend, when conscience tells me they would be struck with astonishment and abhorrence could they hear the whole.

But if this awful effect of heart-depravity cannot be wholly avoided in the present state of human nature, yet, at least, I would not allow and indulge it; yet this I find I do. In defiance of my best judgment and best wishes, I find something within me which cherishes and cleaves to those evils, from which I ought to start and flee, as I should if a toad or a serpent was put in my food or in my bed. Ah! how vile must the heart, (at least my heart,) be, that can hold a parley with such

abominations, when I so well know their nature and their tendency. Surely he who finds himself capable of this, may, without the least affection of humility, (however fair his outward conduct appears,) subscribe himself less than the least of all saints, and of sinners the very chief.

I would not be influenced by a principle of self on any occasion; yet this evil I often do. I see the baseness and absurdity of such a conduct as clearly as I see the light of the day. I do not affect to be thought ten feet high, and I know that a desire of being thought wise or good, is equally contrary to reason and truth. I should be grieved or angry if my fellow-creatures supposed I had such a desire: and therefore I fear the very principle of self, of which I complain, has a considerable share in prompting my desires to conceal it. The pride of others often offends me, and makes me studious to hide my own; because their good opinion of me depends much upon their not perceiving it. But the Lord knows how this dead fly taints and spoils my best services, and makes them no better than specious sins.

I would not indulge vain reasonings concerning the counsels, ways, and providences of God; yet I am prone to do it. That the Judge of all the earth will do right, is to me as evident and necessary as that two and two make four. I believe that he has a sovereign right to do what he will with his own, and that this sovereignty is but another name for the unlimited exercise of wisdom and goodness. But my reasonings are often such, as if I had never heard of these principles, or had formally renounced them. I feel the workings of a presumptuous spirit that would account for every thing, and venture to dispute whatever it cannot comprehend.

What an evil is this, for a potsherd of the earth to contend with its Maker! I do not act thus towards my fellow-creatures; I do not find fault with the decisions of a judge, or the dispositions of a general, because, though I know they are fallible, yet I suppose they are wiser in their respective departments than myself. But I am often ready to take this liberty when it is most unreasonable and inexcusable.

I would not cleave to a covenant of works: it should seem from the foregoing particulars, and many others which I could mention, that I have reasons enough to deter me from this. Yet even this I do. Not but that I say, and I hope from my heart, Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; I embrace it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; and it is the main pleasure and business of my life, to set forth the necessity and all-sufficiency of the Mediator between God and man, and to make mention of his righteousness, even of his only. But here, as in every thing else, I find a vast difference between my judgment and my experience. I am invited to take the water of life *freely*, yet often discouraged, because I have nothing wherewith to pay for it. If I am at times favoured with some liberty from the above-mentioned evil, it rather gives me a more favourable opinion of myself, than increases my admiration of the Lord's goodness to so unworthy a creature; and when the returning tide of my corruptions convinces me that *I am still the same*, an unbelieving legal spirit would urge me to conclude that the Lord is changed: at least, I feel a weariness of being beholden to him for such continued multiplied forgiveness; and I fear that some part of my striving against sin, and my

desires after an increase of sanctification, arises from a secret wish that I might not be so absolutely and entirely indebted to him.

This, my Lord, is only a faint sketch of my heart; but it is taken from the life: it would require a volume rather than a letter to fill up the outlines. But I believe you will not regret that I choose to say no more upon such a subject. But though my disease is grievous, it is not desperate; I have a gracious and infallible physician. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.

I remain, my Lord, &c.

LETTER VI.

My Lord, April—1772.

MY two last letters turned upon a mournful subject, the depravity of the heart, which impedes us when we would do good, and pollutes our best intended services with evil. We have cause, upon this account, to go softly all our days; yet we need not sorrow as they who have no hope. The Lord has provided his people relief under those complaints, and teaches us to draw improvement from them. If the evils we feel were not capable of being over-ruled for good, he would not permit them to remain in us. This we may infer from his hatred to sin, and the love which he bears to his people.

As to the remedy, neither our state nor his honour are affected by the workings of indwelling sin, in the hearts of those whom he has taught to wrestle, strive, and mourn, on account of what they feel. Though sin wars, it shall not reign; and though it breaks our peace,

it cannot separate from his love. Nor is it inconsistent with his holiness and perfection, to manifest his favour to such poor defiled creatures, or to admit them to communion with himself; for they are not considered as in themselves, but as one with Jesus, to whom they have fled for refuge, and by whom they live a life of faith. They are accepted in the Beloved, they have an Advocate with the Father, who once made an atonement for their sins, and ever lives to make intercession for their persons. Though they cannot fulfil the law, he has fulfilled it for them; though the obedience of the members is defiled and imperfect, the obedience of the head is spotless and complete; and though there is much evil in them, there is something good, the fruit of his own gracious Spirit. They act from a principle of love, they aim at no less than his glory, and their habitual desires are supremely fixed upon himself. There is a difference in kind between the feeblest efforts of faith in a real believer, while he is covered with shame at the thoughts of his miscarriages, and the highest and most specious attainments of those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. Nor shall this conflict remain long, or the enemy finally prevail over them. They are supported by almighty power, and led on to certain victory. They shall not always be as they are now; yet a little while, and they shall be freed from this vile body, which, like the leprous house, is incurably contaminated, and must be entirely taken down. Then they shall see Jesus as he is, and be like him, and with him for ever.

The gracious purposes to which the Lord makes the sense and feeling of our depravity subservient, are manifold. Hereby his own power, wisdom, faithfulness, and love, are more signally displayed. His power, in

maintaining his own work in the midst of so much opposition, like a spark burning in the water, or a bush unconsumed in the flames. His wisdom, in defeating and controlling all the devices which Satan, from his knowledge of the evil of our nature, is encouraged to practise against us. He has overthrown many a fair professor, and, like Goliah, he challenges the whole army of Israel; yet he finds there are some against whom, though he thrusts sorely, he cannot prevail; notwithstanding any seeming advantage he gains at some seasons, they are still delivered, for the Lord is on their side. The unchangeableness of the Lord's love, and the riches of his mercy, are likewise more illustrated by the multiplied pardons he bestows upon his people, than if they needed no forgiveness at all.

Hereby the Lord Jesus Christ is more endeared to the soul; all boasting is effectually excluded, and the glory of a full and free salvation is ascribed to him alone. If a mariner is surprised by a storm, and after one night spent in jeopardy, is presently brought safe into port; though he may rejoice in his deliverance, it will not affect him so sensibly, as if, after being tempest-tossed for a long season, and experiencing a great number and variety of hair-breadth escapes, he at last gains the desired haven. The righteous are said to be scarcely saved, not with respect to the certainty of the event, for the purpose of God in their favour cannot be disappointed; but in respect of their own apprehensions, and the great difficulties they are brought through. But when, after a long experience of their own deceitful hearts, after repeated proofs of their weakness, wilfulness, ingratitude, and insensibility, they find that none of these things can separate them from the love of God in Christ, Jesus becomes more and more precious to

their souls. They love much, because much has been forgiven them. They dare not, they will not ascribe any thing to themselves, but are glad to acknowledge, that they must have perished, (if possible,) a thousand times over, if Jesus had not been their Saviour, their shepherd, and their shield. When they were wandering he brought them back, when fallen he raised them, when wounded he healed them, when fainting he revived them. By him out of weakness they have been made strong; he has taught their hands to war, and covered their heads in the day of battle. In a word, some of the clearest proofs they have had of his excellence, have been occasioned by the mortifying proofs they have had of their own vileness. They would not have known so much of him, if they had not known so much of themselves.

Further, a spirit of humiliation, which is both the *Decus et Tutamen*, the strength and beauty of our profession, is greatly promoted by our feeling, as well as reading, that when we would do good, evil is present with us. A broken and contrite spirit is pleasing to the Lord, he has promised to dwell with those who have it; and experience shows, that the exercise of all our graces is in proportion to the humbling sense we have of the depravity of our nature. But that we are so totally depraved, is a truth which no one ever truly learned by being only told it. Indeed, if we could receive, and habitually maintain, a right judgment of ourselves, by what is plainly declared in Scripture, it would probably save us many a mournful hour; but experience is the Lord's school, and they who are taught by him usually learn, that they have no wisdom by the mistakes they make, and that they have no strength by the slips and falls they meet with. Every day draws forth some new

corruption which before was little observed, or at least discovers it in a stronger light than before. Thus by degrees they are weaned from leaning to any supposed wisdom, power, or goodness in themselves; they feel the truth of our Lord's words, "without me ye can do "nothing;" and the necessity of crying with David, "O lead me and guide me for thy name's sake." It is chiefly by this frame of mind that one Christian is differenced from another; for, though it is an inward feeling, it has very observable outward effects, which are expressively intimated, Ezek. xvi. 63. "Thou shalt be "dumb and not open thy mouth, in the day when I am "pacified towards thee, saith the Lord God." The knowledge of my full and free forgiveness of thy innumerable backslidings and transgressions, shall make thee ashamed, and silence the unruly workings of thine heart. Thou shalt open thy mouth in praise; but thou shalt no more boast in thyself, or censure others, or repine at my dispensations. In these respects we are exceedingly prone to speak unadvisedly with our lips. But a sense of great unworthiness and much forgiveness checks these evils. Whoever is truly humble will not be easily angry, will not be positive and rash, will be compassionate and tender to the infirmities of his fellow-sinners, knowing, that if there be a difference, it is grace that has made it, and that he has the seeds of every evil in his own heart; and, under all trials and afflictions, he will look to the hand of the Lord, and lay his mouth in the dust, acknowledging that he suffers much less than his iniquities have deserved. These are some of the advantages and good fruits which the Lord enables us to obtain from that bitter root, indwelling sin.

I am, with great deference, &c.

LETTER VII.

My Lord, September—1772.

WEAK, unskilful, and unfaithful, as I am in practice, the Lord has been pleased to give me some idea of what a Christian ought to be, and of what is actually attainable in the present life, by those whom he enables earnestly to aspire towards the prize of their high calling. They who are versed in mechanics can, from a knowledge of the combined powers of a complicated machine, make an exact calculation of what it is able to perform, and what resistance it can counteract; but who can compute the possible effects of that combination of principles and motives revealed in the Gospel, upon a heart duly impressed with a sense of their importance and glory? When I was lately at Mr. Cox's Museum, while I was fixing my attention upon some curious movements, imagining that I saw the whole of the artist's design, the person who showed it touched a little spring, and suddenly a thousand new and unexpected motions took place, and the whole piece seemed animated from the top to the bottom. I should have formed but a very imperfect judgment of it, had I seen no more than what I saw at first. I thought it might in some measure illustrate the vast difference that is observable amongst professors, even amongst those who are, it is to be hoped, sincere. There are persons who appear to have a true knowledge, (in part,) of the nature of the Gospel-religion, but seem not to be apprised of its properties, in their comprehension and extent. If they have attained to some hope of their acceptance; if they find at seasons some communion with God in the

means of grace; if they are in measure delivered from the prevailing and corrupt customs of the world, they seem to be satisfied, as if they were possessed of all. These are indeed great things; *Sed meliora latent.* The profession of too many, whose sincerity charity would be unwilling to impeach, is greatly blemished, notwithstanding their hopes and their occasional comforts, by the breakings forth of unsanctified tempers, and the indulgence of vain hopes, anxious cares, and selfish pursuits. Far, very far, am I from that unscriptural sentiment of sinless perfection in fallen man. To those who have a due sense of the spirituality and ground of the divine precepts, and of what passes in their own hearts, there will never be wanting causes of humiliation and self-abasement on the account of sin; yet still there is a liberty and privilege attainable by the Gospel, beyond what is ordinarily thought of. Permit me to mention two or three particulars, in which those who have a holy ambition of aspiring to them shall not be altogether disappointed.

A delight in the Lord's all-sufficiency, to be satisfied in him as our present and eternal portion. This, in the sense in which I understand it, is not the effect of a present warm frame, but of a deeply rooted and abiding principle; the habitual exercise of which is to be estimated by the comparative indifference with which other things are regarded. The soul thus principled is not at leisure to take or to seek satisfaction in any thing but what has a known subserviency to this leading taste. Either the Lord is present, and then he is to be rejoiced in; or else he is absent, and then he is to be sought and waited for. They are to be pitied, who, if they are at some times happy in the Lord, can at other times be happy without him, and rejoice in broken cisterns, when

their spirits are at a distance from the fountain of living waters. I do not plead for an absolute indifference to temporal blessings; he gives us all things richly to *enjoy;* and a capacity of relishing them is his gift likewise; but then the consideration of his love in bestowing should exceedingly enhance the value, and a regard to his will should regulate their use. Nor can they all supply the want of *that* which we can only receive immediately from himself. This principle likewise moderates that inordinate fear and sorrow to which we are liable upon the prospect or the occurrence of great trials, for which there is a sure support and resource provided in the all-sufficiency, of infinite goodness and grace. What a privilege is this, to possess God *in all things* while we have them, and all things in God when they are taken from us.

An acquiescence in the Lord's will, founded in a persuasion of his wisdom, holiness, sovereignty, and goodness. This is one of the greatest privileges and brightest ornaments of our profession. So far as we attain to this, we are secure from disappointment. Our own limited views, and short-sighted purposes and desires, may be, and will be, often over-ruled; but then our main and leading desire, that the will of the Lord may be done, must be accomplished. How highly does it become us, both as creatures and as sinners, to submit to the appointments of our Maker! and how necessary is it to our peace! This great attainment is too often unthought of, and overlooked; we are prone to fix our attention upon the second causes and immediate instruments of events; forgetting that whatever befalls us is according to his purpose, and therefore must be right and seasonable in itself, and shall in the issue be productive of good. From hence arise impatience, resentment, and secret repinings, which are not only sinful,

but tormenting: whereas, if all things are in his hand, if the very hairs of our head are numbered; if every event, great and small, is under the direction of his providence and purpose; and if he has a wise, holy, and gracious end in view, to which every thing that happens is subordinate and subservient;—then we have nothing to do, but with patience and humility to follow as he leads, and cheerfully to expect a happy issue. The path of present duty is marked out; and the concerns of the next and every succeeding hour are in his hands. How happy are they who can resign all to him, see his hand in every dispensation, and believe that he chooses better for them than they possibly could for themselves!

A single eye to his glory, as the ultimate scope of all our undertakings. The Lord can design nothing short of his own glory, nor should we. The constraining love of Christ has a direct and marvellous tendency, in proportion to the measure of faith, to mortify the corrupt principle, *Self*, which for a season is the grand spring of our conduct, and by which we are too much biassed after we know the Lord. But as grace prevails, self is renounced. We feel that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price; and that it is our duty, our honour, and our happiness, to be servants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To devote soul and body, every talent, power, and faculty, to the service of his cause and will; to let our light shine, (in our several situations,) to the praise of his grace; to place our highest joy in the contemplation of his adorable perfections; to rejoice even in tribulations and distresses, in reproaches and infirmities, if thereby the power of Christ may rest upon us, and be magnified in us; to be content, yea, glad to be nothing, that he may be all in all;—to obey *him*, in opposition to the threats or solicitations of men; to trust

him, though all outward appearances seem against us; to rejoice in *him*, though we should, (as will sooner or later be the case,) have nothing else to rejoice in;—to live above the world, and to have our conversation in heaven; to be like the angels, finding our own pleasure in performing his:—This, my lord, is the prize, the mark of our high calling, to which we are encouraged with a holy ambition continually to aspire. It is true, we shall still fall short; we shall find, that when we would do good, evil will be present with us. But the attempt is glorious, and shall not be wholly in vain. He that gives us thus *to will*, will enable us to perform with growing success, and teach us to profit even by our mistakes and imperfections

O blessed man! that thus fears the Lord, that delights in his word, and derives his principles, motives, maxims, and consolations, from that unfailing source of light and strength. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf is always green, and fruit abundant. The wisdom that is above shall direct his plans, inspire his counsels; and the power of God shall guard him on every side, and prepare his way through every difficulty: he shall see mountains sink into plains, and streams spring up in the dry wilderness. The Lord's enemies will be his; and they may be permitted to fight against him, but they shall not prevail, for the Lord is with him to deliver him. The conduct of such a one, though in a narrow and retired sphere of life, is of more real excellence and importance, than the most splendid actions of kings and conquerors, which fill the annals of history, Prov. xvi. 32. And if the God whom he serves is pleased to place him in a more public light, his labours and cares will be amply compensated, by the superior opportunities afforded him of manifesting the

power and reality of true religion, and promoting the good of mankind.

I hope I *may* say, that I *desire* to be thus entirely given up to the Lord; I am sure I *must* say, that what I have written is far from being my actual experience. Alas! I might be condemned out of my own mouth, were the Lord strict to mark what is amiss. But, O the comfort! we are not under the law, but under grace. The Gospel is a dispensation for sinners, and we have an Advocate with the Father. *There* is the unshaken ground of hope. A reconciled Father, a prevailing Advocate, a powerful Shepherd, a compassionate Friend, a Saviour, who is able and willing to save to the uttermost. He knows our frame; he remembers that we are but dust; and has opened for us a new and blood-besprinkled way of access to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need.

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

My Lord, April—1773.

FOR five or six weeks past I have been a good deal indisposed. The ground of my complaint was a cold, attended with a slight fever, and for some time with a cough, which made me feel some inconvenience in preaching; to this succeeded a deafness, so great as to cut me off from conversation: for I could not hear the sound of a voice, unless it was spoken loud in my ear. But the Lord has mercifully removed the fever and cough, opened my ears, and I am now nearly as well as usual. I had cause to be thankful, especially for two

things, under this dispensation: First, that I was enabled, though sometimes with a little difficulty, to go on with my public work. It is a singular favour I have to acknowledge, that for the space of almost nine years, since I have been in the ministry, our sabbath and weekly opportunities have not been once suspended: whereas I have seen many of the Lord's servants laid by for a considerable space within that time. My other great mercy was, that the Lord was pleased to preserve me in a peaceful resigned frame; so that when I was deaf, and could not be certain that I should recover my hearing any more, I was in general as cheerful and easy as at other times. This was the effect of his goodness:—for though I know enough of his sovereignty, wisdom, and faithfulness; of his right to do what he pleases, and the certainty that he does all things well, to furnish me with arguments enough to prove that submission to his will is our absolute duty; yet I am sensible, that when the trial actually comes, notwithstanding all the advice I may have offered to others, I should myself toss like a wild bull in a net; rebel and repine; forget that I am a sinner, and that he is sovereign; this, I say, would always and invariably be the case, unless he was graciously pleased to fulfil his word, that strength shall be according to the day. I hope my deafness has been instructive to me. The exercise of our senses is so easily and constantly performed, that it seems a thing of course; but I was then reminded how precarious the tenure is by which we hold those blessings which seem most our own, and which are most immediately necessary to the comfortable enjoyment of life. Outward senses, mental faculties, health of body, and peace of mind, are extremely valuable: but the continuance of them for a single moment de-

pends upon him who, if he opens none can shut, and when he shuts none can open. A minute is more than sufficient to deprive us of what we hold most dear, or to prevent us from deriving the least comfort from it if it is not taken away. I am not presuming to give your lordship information; but only mentioning the thoughts that were much upon my mind while I was incapable of conversation. These are indeed plain and obvious truths, which I have long acknowledged as indisputable; but I have reason to be thankful when the Lord impresses them with fresh power upon my heart, even though he sees fit to do it by the medium of afflictions. I have seen of late something of the weight and importance of that admonition, Jer. ix. 23, 24. A passage which, though addressed to the wise, the mighty, and the rich, is of universal application;—for self, unless corrected and mortified by grace, will find something whereof to glory, in the meanest characters and the lowest situation. And indeed, when things come to be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, the lunatics in Bedlam, some of whom glory in their straw or their chains, as marks of splendour or ensigns of royalty, have as much reason on their side, as any persons upon earth who glory in themselves. This alone is the proper ground of glory and joy, if we know the Lord. Then all is safe at present, and all will be happy for ever. Then, whatever changes may affect our temporal concernments, our best interests and hopes are secured beyond the reach of change; and whatever we may lose or suffer during this little span of time, will be abundantly compensated in that glorious state of eternity which is just at hand.

I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

My Lord, December—1772.

I LATELY employed some of my leisure hours, (which, when I am not indolent, are but few,) in reading the Memoirs of the duke of Sully, which occasionally came in my way. It afforded me matter for variety of reflections. I pity the duke of Sully, whose attachment to the name of a Protestant seems to have been little more than a point of honour, who drew all his resources from himself, and whose chief aim seems to have been to approve himself faithful to an earthly master. He acted as well as could be expected from natural principles; and the Lord, who employed him as an instrument of his providence, rewarded his fidelity with success, honour, and riches: a reward which, though in itself a poor one, is suited to the desires of men who place their happiness in worldly things, and is so far a compensation of their services. It is given to your lordship to act from nobler principles, and with more enlarged views. You serve a Master, of whose favour, protection, and assistance, you cannot be deprived; who will not overlook or misconstrue the smallest service you attempt for him; who will listen to no insinuations against you, who is always near to comfort, direct and strengthen you; and who is preparing for you such honours and blessings as he only can give, an inheritance, (the reverse of all earthly good,) αφθαρτον, και αμιαντον, και αμαραντον*. Thus animated and thus supported, assisted likewise by the prayers of thousands, may we not warrantably hope

* Incorruptible, undefiled, unfading.

that your lordship will be an instrument of great good, and that both church and state will be benefited by your example, counsels, and care?

In another view, the duke of Sully's history exhibits a comment upon the Psalmist's words, "Surely man in "his best estate is altogether vanity." View him in one light, he seems to have possessed all that the most aspiring mind could aim at—the favour and confidence of his prince, accumulated wealth, great honours, and such power by his offices and influence with the king, that he could almost do what he pleased. Yet he had so much to suffer from the fatigues and difficulties of his station, and the cabals and malice of his enemies, that, in the midst of all his grandeur, a dispassionate mind would rather pity than envy him. And how suddenly were his schemes broken by the death of the king! Then he lost his friend, his protector, his influence. The remainder of his days were imbittered by many inquietudes; he lived indeed, (if that could afford any consolation,) in much state and pageantry afterwards; but after having toiled through more than fourscore years, died at last almost of a broken heart from domestic uneasinesses. And is this all that the world can do for those who are accounted most successful! Alas!

Too low they build who build below the skies.

And what a picture of the instability of human things have we in his master Henry! Admired, beloved, dreaded; full of vast designs, fondly supposing himself born to be the arbiter of Europe, in an awful moment, and in the midst of his friends, suddenly struck from the height of his grandeur, and snatched into the

invisible, unchangeable world. In that moment all his thoughts perished.

How unspeakably awful such a transition! How remarkable were his own forebodings of the approaching hour! O Lord, how dost thou pour contempt upon princes, and teach us that the great and the mean are equally in thy hands, and at thy disposal, as clay in the hands of the potter! Poor king! while he expected obedience to his own commands, he lived in habitual defiance of the commands of God. Men may respect his memory, for his sincerity, benevolence, and other amiable qualities; but besides that, he was engrossed by a round of sensual pleasure, (when business of state did not interfere,) his life was stained with adultery. Happy, if in the hours he spent in retirement, when the pre-intimation of his death hung heavy upon his mind, the Lord humbled and softened his heart, and gave him repentance unto life! I wish the history afforded a proof of this. However, in his death, we see an affecting proof, that no human dignity or power can ward off the stroke of the Almighty, who by such sudden and unexpected dispensations often shows himself terrible to the princes and great men of the earth. O! that they could see his hand, and wisely consider his doing in them.

But happy is the man who fears the Lord, and delights in his commandments; who sets God always before him, and acts under the constraining influence of redeeming love. *He* is the real friend and the best champion of his country, who makes, not the vague notions of human wisdom and honour, but the precepts and example of the blessed Jesus, the model and the motive of his conduct. He inculcates, (as occasion

offers,) the great truths of religion in his conversation, and demonstrates them by his practice; yet the best part of his life is known only to God and himself. His time is divided between serving his country in public, and wrestling for it in private. Nor shall his labours or his prayers be lost. Either he shall have the desire of his heart, and shall see the religion and the liberty he so highly values transmitted to posterity; or, if he should live when wrath is decreed, and there is no remedy, the promise and the providence of God shall seal him as the peculiar charge of angels, in the midst of public calamity. And when all things are involved in confusion, when the hearts of the wicked shall shake like the leaves of the forest, he shall be kept in perfect peace, trusting in the Lord.

I am, with the greatest deference, &c.

LETTER X.

My Lord, March—1773.

USUALLY for some days before I purpose writing to your lordship, my thoughts are upon the stretch for a subject; I do not mean all day long, but it is so more or less: but I might as well spare my inquiries; I can come to no determination, and for the most part begin to write at an absolute uncertainty how I am to proceed. Since I cannot premeditate, my heart prays that it may be given me in the same hour what I shall offer. A simple dependence upon the teaching and influence of the good Spirit of God, so as not to supersede the use of appointed means, would, if it could be uniformly maintained, make every part of duty easy and successful. It would free us from much solicitude, and pre-

vent many mistakes.—Methinks I have a subject in view already, a subject of great importance to myself, and which perhaps will not be displeasing to your lordship: How to walk with God in the daily occurrences of life, so as to do every thing for his sake and by his strength.

When we are justified by faith, and accepted in the Beloved, we become heirs of everlasting life; but we cannot know the full value of our privileges till we enter upon the state of glory. For this, most who are converted have to wait some time after they are partakers of grace. Though the Lord loves them, hates sin, and teaches them to hate it, he appoints them to remain a while in a sinful world, and to groan under the burden of a depraved nature. He could put them in immediate possession of the heaven for which he has given them a meetness, but he does not. He has a service for them here, an honour which is worth all they can suffer, and for which eternity will not afford an opportunity, namely, to be instruments of promoting his designs, and manifesting his grace in the world. Strictly speaking, this is the whole of our business here, the only reason why life is prolonged, or for which it is truly desirable, that we may fill up our connexions and situations, improve our comforts and our crosses, in such a manner as that God may be glorified in us and by us. As he is a bountiful Master and a kind Father, he is pleased to afford a variety of temporal blessings, which sweeten our service, and as coming from his hand are very valuable, but are by no means worth living for, considered in themselves, as they can neither satisfy our desires, preserve us from trouble, or support us under it. That light of God's countenance, which can pervade the walls and dissipate the gloom of a dungeon, is unspeakably preferable to all that can be enjoyed in a palace

without it. The true end of life is, to live not to ourselves, but to him who died for us; and while we devote ourselves to his service upon earth, to rejoice in the prospect of being happy with him for ever in heaven. These things are generally known and acknowledged by professors; but they are a *favoured few* who act consistently with their avowed principles; who honestly, diligently, and without reserve, endeavour to make the most of their talents and strength in promoting the Lord's service, and allow themselves in no views or designs but what are plainly subordinate and subservient to it. Yea, I believe the best of the Lord's servants see cause enough to confess, that they are not only unprofitable in comparison of what they wish to be, but in many instances unfaithful likewise. They find so many snares, hindrances, and temptations, arising from without, and so much embarrassment from sin which dwells within, that they have more cause for humiliation than self-complacence, when they seem most earnest and most useful. However, we have no Scriptural evidence that we serve the Lord at all, any further than we find an habitual desire and aim to serve him wholly. He is gracious to our imperfections and weakness; yet he requires all the heart, and will not be served by halves, nor accept what is performed by a divided spirit. I lately met with some profane scoffs of Voltaire upon the sentiment of doing all to the glory of God, (such as might be expected from such a man;) however, *this* is the true alchymy which turns every thing to gold, and ennobles the common actions of life into acts of religion, 1 Cor. x. 31. Nor is there a grain of real goodness in the most specious actions which are performed without a reference to God's glory. This the world cannot understand; but it will appear highly reasonable to those who take their ideas

of God from the Scripture, and who have felt the necessity, and found the benefits of redemption. We are debtors many ways. The Lord has a right to us by creation, by redemption, by conquest, when he freed us from Satan's power, and took possession of our hearts by his grace; and lastly, by our own voluntary surrender in the day when he enabled us to fix our choice on himself, as our Lord and our portion. Then we felt the force of our obligations, we saw the beauty and honour of his service, and that nothing was worthy to stand in the least degree of competition with it. This is always equally true though our perceptions of it are not always equally strong. But where it has been once really known, it cannot be wholly forgotten, or cease to be the governing principle of life; and the Lord has promised to revive the impression in those who wait upon him, and thereby to renew their strength. For in proportion as we feel by what ties we are his, we shall embrace his service as perfect freedom.

Again, when the eye is thus single, the whole body will be full of light. The principle of acting simply for God, will in general make the path of duty plain, solve a thousand otherwise dubious questions, lead to the most proper and obvious means, and preclude that painful anxiety about events, which upon no other plan can be avoided. The love of God is the best casuist; especially as it leads us to a careful attendance to his precepts, a reliance on his promises, and a submission to his will. Most of our perplexities arise from an undue, though perhaps unperceived, attachment to self. Either we have some scheme of our own too closely connected with our general view of serving the Lord, or lay some stress upon our own management, which though we suspect it may possibly fail us, we cannot entirely help

trusting to. In these respects the Lord permits his servants occasionally to feel their own weakness; but if they are sincerely devoted to him, he will teach them to profit by it, and bring them by degrees to a simplicity of dependence, as well as of intention. Then all things are easy. Acting from love, and walking by faith, they can neither be disappointed or discouraged. Duty is their part, care is his, and they are enabled to cast it upon him. They know that when their expedients seem to fail, he is still all-sufficient. They know that, being engaged in his cause, they cannot miscarry; and that, though in some things they may seem to fall short of success, they are sure of meeting acceptance, and that he will estimate their services, not by their actual effects, but according to the gracious principle and desire he has put into their hearts, 2 Chron. vi. 7, 8.

I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

My Lord, June—1773.

MY old cast-off acquaintance, Horace, occasionally came in my way this morning.—I opened it upon lib. 3. od. 29. Did I not know the proposal to be utterly impracticable, how gladly should I imitate it, and send your lordship, in honest prose, if not in elegant verse, an invitation. But I must content myself with the idea of the pleasure it would give me to sit with you half a day under my favourite great tree, and converse with you, not concerning the comparatively petty affairs of human governments, but of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. How many delightful subjects would suggest themselves in a free and retired conversation. The

excellency of our King, the permanency and glory of his kingdom, the beauty of his administration, the privileges of his subjects, the review of what he has done for us, and the prospect of what he has prepared for us in future;—and if, while we were conversing, he should be pleased to join us, (as he did the disciples when walking to Emmaus,) how would our hearts burn within us! Indeed, whether we are alone or in company, the most interesting topics strike us but faintly, unless he is pleased to afford his gracious influence; but when he is present, light, love, liberty, and joy, spring up in the hearts that know him.—This reminds me, (as I have mentioned Horace,) to restore some beautiful lines to their proper application. They are impious and idolatrous as he uses them, but have an expressive propriety in the mouth of a believer:—

Lucem redde tuæ, Dux bone, patriæ,
Instar veris enim vultus ubi tuus
Affulsit populo, gratior it Dies
Et Soles melius nitent.

But we cannot meet. All that is left for me, is to use the liberty you allow me of offering a few hints upon these subjects by letter, not because you know them not, but because you love them. The hour is coming, when all impediments shall be removed.—All distinctions shall cease that are founded upon sublunary things, and the earth and all its works shall be burnt up. Glorious day! May our souls be filled with the thought, and learn to estimate all things around us *now*, by the view in which they will appear to us *then*. Then it will be of small moment who was the prince, and who was the beggar in this life;—but who in their several situations, sought, and loved, and feared, and honoured the

Lord. Alas! how many of the kings of the earth, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, will then say, (in vain,) to the mountains and the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us! In this world they are for the most part too busy to regard the commands of God, or too happy to seek his favour; they have their good things here; they please themselves for a while, and in a moment they go down to the grave: in that moment their thoughts perish, their schemes are left unfinished, they are torn from their possessions, and enter upon a new, an untried, an unchangeable, a never-ending state of existence. Alas, is this all the world can afford! I congratulate you, my lord, not because God has appointed you to appear in an elevated rank, (this, abstracted from the opportunity it affords you of greater usefulness, would perhaps be a more proper subject for condolence;) but that he has admitted you to those honours and privileges which come *from him only*, and which so few in the superior ranks of life think worthy of their attention. I doubt not but you are often affected with a sense of this distinguishing mercy. But though we know that we are debtors, great debtors to the grace of God, which alone has made us to differ, we know it but imperfectly at present. It doth not yet appear what we shall be, nor can we form a just conception of the misery from which we are redeemed, much less of the price paid for our redemption. How little do we know of the Redeemer's dignity, and of the unutterable distress he endured when his soul was made an offering for sin, and it pleased the Father to bruise him, that by his stripes we might be healed. These things will strike us quite in another manner, when we view them in the light of eternity. Then, to return to the thought from which I have rambled, then and there I trust we

shall meet to the highest advantage, and spend an everlasting day together in happiness and praise. With this thought I endeavour to comfort myself, under the regret I sometimes feel that I can have so little intercourse with you in this life.

May the cheering contemplation of the hope set before us, support and animate us to improve the interval, and fill us with an holy ambition of shining as lights in the world, to the praise and glory of his grace who has called us out of darkness. Encompassed as we are with snares, temptations, and infirmities, it is possible, (by his promised assistance,) to live in some good measure above the world while we are in it; above the influence of its cares, its smiles, or its frowns. Our conversation, πολιτευμα, our citizenship is in heaven. We are not at home. but only resident here for a season, to fulfil an appointed service; and the Lord, whom we serve, has encouraged us to hope, that he will guide us by his wisdom, strengthen us by his power, and comfort us with the light of his countenance, which is better than life. Every blessing we receive from him is a token of his favour, and a pledge of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which he has reserved for us. O! to hear him say at last, Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord! will be a rich amends for all that we can lose, suffer, or forbear, for his sake.

I subscribe myself, with great sincerity, &c.

LETTER XII.

My Lord, February—1774.

THE first line of Horace's epistle to Agustus, when rightly applied, suggests a grand and cheering idea. As addressed by the poet, nothing can be more blasphemous, idolatrous, and absurd ; but with what comfort and propriety may a Christian look up to Him, to whom all power is committed in heaven and earth, and say, *Cum tot sustineas et tanta negotia Solus!* Surely a more weighty and comprehensive sentence never dropped from an uninspired pen. And how beautifully and expressively is it closed by the word *solus!* The government is upon his shoulders ; and though he is concealed by a veil of second causes from common eyes, so that they can perceive only the means, instruments, and contingencies by which he works, and therefore think he does nothing ; yet, in reality, he does *all*, according to his own counsel and pleasure, in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

Who can enumerate the *Tot et tanta negotia*, which are incessantly before his eye, adjusted by his wisdom, dependent on his will, and regulated by his power, in his kingdoms of providence and grace? If we consider the heavens, the work of his fingers, the moon and the stars which he has ordained ; if we call in the assistance of astronomers and glasses to help us in forming a conception of the number, distances, magnitudes, and motions of the heavenly bodies ; the more we search, the more we shall be confirmed, that these are but a portion of his ways.—But he calls them all by their names, upholds them by his power, and without his continual

energy they would rush into confusion, or sink into nothing. If we speak of intelligences, he is the life, the joy, the sun of all that are capable of happiness. Whatever may be signified by the thrones, principalities, and powers in the world of light, they are all dependent upon his power, and obedient to his command; it is equally true of angels as of men, that without him they can do nothing. The powers of darkness are likewise under his subjection and control. Though but little is said of them in Scripture, we read enough to assure us that their number must be immensely great, and that their strength, subtley, and malice, are such as we may tremble to think of them as our enemies, and probably should, but for our strange insensibility to whatever does not fall under the cognizance of our outward senses. But he holds them all in a chain, so that they can do or attempt nothing but by his permission; and whatever he permits them to do, (though they mean nothing less,) has its appointed subserviency in accomplishing his designs.

But to come nearer home, and to speak of what seems more suited to our scanty apprehensions,—still we may be lost in wonder. Before this blessed and only Potentate, all the nations of the earth are but as the dust upon the balance, and the small drop of a bucket, and might be thought, (if compared with the immensity of his works,) scarcely worthy of his notice; yet here he presides, pervades, provides, protects, and rules In him his creatures live, move, and have their being: from him is their food and preservation. The eyes of all are upon him: what he gives they gather, and can gather no more: and at his word they sink into the dust. There is not a worm that crawls upon the ground, or a flower that grows in the pathless wil-

derness, or a shell upon the sea shore, but bears the impress of his wisdom, power, and goodness. With respect to men, he reigns with uncontrolled dominion over every kingdom, family, and individual. Here we may be astonished at his wisdom in employing free agents, the greater part of whom are his enemies, to accomplish his purposes. But, however reluctant, they all serve him. His patience likewise is wonderful.—Multitudes, yea, nearly our whole species, spend the life and strength which he affords them, and abuse all the bounties he heaps upon them, in the ways of sin. His commands are disregarded, his name blasphemed, his mercy disdained, his power defied, yet still he spares. It is an eminent part of his government, to restrain the depravity of human nature, and in various ways to check its effects, which, if left to itself without his providential control, would presently make earth the very image of hell. For the vilest men are not suffered to perpetrate a thousandth part of the evil which their hearts would prompt them to. The earth, though lying in the wicked one, is filled with the goodness of the Lord. He preserveth man and beast, sustains the young lion in the forest, feeds the birds of the air, which have neither storehouse nor barn, and adorns the insects and the flowers of the field with a beauty and elegance beyond all that can be found in the courts of kings.

Still more wonderful is his administration in his kingdom of grace. He is present with all his creatures, but in a peculiar manner with his own people. Each of these are monuments of a more illustrious display of power, than that which spread abroad the heavens like a curtain, and laid the foundations of the earth; for he

finds them all in a state of rebellion and enmity, and makes them a willing people; and from the moment he reveals his love to them, he espouses their cause, and takes all their concerns into his hands. He is near and attentive to every one of them, as if there was only that one. This high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, before whom the angels vail their faces, condescends to hold communion with those whom men despise. He sees not as man seeth—rides on a cloud disdainful by a sultan or a czar, to manifest himself to an humble soul in a mud-walled cottage. He comforts them when in trouble, strengthens them when weak, makes their beds in sickness, revives them when fainting, upholds them when falling, and so seasonably and effectually manages for them, that though they are persecuted and tempted, though their enemies are many and mighty, nothing that they feel or fear is able to separate them from his love.

And all this He does *solus*. All the abilities, powers, and instincts, that are found amongst creatures, are emanations from his fullness. All changes, successes, disappointments—all that is memorable in the annals of history, all the risings and falls of empires, all the turns in human life, take place according to his plan. In vain men contrive and combine to accomplish their own counsels, unless they are parts of his counsel likewise; the efforts of their utmost strength and wisdom are crossed and reversed by the feeblest and most unthought-of circumstances. But when he has a work to accomplish, and his time is come, however inadequate and weak the means he employs may seem to a carnal eye, the success is infallibly secured: for all things serve him, and are in his hands as clay in the hands of the

potter. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!

This is the God whom we adore. This is he who invites us to lean upon his almighty arm, and promises to guide us with his unerring eye. He says to you, my lord, and even to me, "Fear not, I am with thee; be "not dismayed, I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, "yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee, with the "right hand of my righteousness." Therefore, while in the path of duty, and following his call, we may cheerfully pass on, regardless of apparent difficulties; for the Lord, whose we are, and who has taught us to make his glory our highest end, will go before us, and at his word crooked things become straight, light shines out of darkness, and mountains sink into plains. Faith may and must be exercised, experience must and will confirm what his word declares, that the heart is deceitful, and that man in his best estate is vanity. But his promises to them that fear him shall be confirmed likewise, and they shall find him, in all situations, a sun, a shield, and an exceeding great reward.

I have lost another of my people; a mother in our Israel; a person of much experience, eminent grace, wisdom, and usefulness. She walked with God forty years: she was one of the Lord's poor; but her poverty was decent, sanctified, and honourable. She lived respected, and her death is considered as a public loss. It is a great loss to me: I shall miss her advice and example, by which I have been often edified and animated. But Jesus still lives. Almost her last words were, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul."

I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

My Lord, March 10, 1774.

FOR about six weeks past, I have had occasion to spend several hours of almost every day with the sick and the dying. These scenes are to a minister like walking the hospitals to a young surgeon. The various cases which occur exemplify, illustrate, and explain, with a commanding energy, many truths, which may be learned indeed at home, but cannot be so well understood, or their force so sensibly felt, without the advantage of experience and observation. As physicians, besides that competent general knowledge of their profession which should be common to them all, have usually their several favourite branches of study, some applying themselves more to botany, others to chemistry, others to anatomy; so ministers, as their inclinations and gifts differ, are led more closely to consider some particular branch of the system of divine truth. Some are directed to state and defend the doctrines of the Gospel; some have a talent for elucidating difficult texts of Scripture; some have a turn for explaining the prophetical parts, and so of the rest.—For myself, if it be lawful to speak of myself, and so far as I can judge, anatomy is my favourite branch: I mean the study of the human heart, with its workings and counter-workings, as it is differently affected in a state of nature or of grace, in the different seasons of prosperity, adversity, conviction, temptation, sickness, and the approach of death. The Lord, by sending me hither, provided me a good school for these purposes. I know not where I could have had a better, or afford-

ing a greater variety of characters, in proportion to the number of people; and as they are mostly a poor people, and strangers to that address which is the result of education and converse with the world, there is a simplicity in what they say or do, which gives me a peculiar advantage in judging of their cases.

But I was about to speak of death. Though the grand evidence of those truths upon which our hopes are built, arises from the authority of God speaking them in his word, and revealing them by his Spirit to the awakened heart, (for till the heart is awakened, it is incapable of receiving this evidence;) yet some of these truths are so mysterious, so utterly repugnant to the judgment of depraved nature, that, through the remaining influence of unbelief and vain reasoning, the temptations of Satan, and the subtle arguments with which some men reputed wise, attack the foundations of our faith, the minds even of believers are sometimes capable of being shaken. I know no better corroborating evidence for the relief of the mind under such assaults than the testimony of dying persons, especially of such as have lived out of the noise of controversy, and who perhaps never heard a syllable of what has been started in these evil days against the Deity of Christ, his atonement, and other important articles. Permit me, my lord, to relate, upon this occasion, some things which exceedingly struck me in the conversation I had with a young woman, whom I visited in her last illness, about two years ago. She was a sober, prudent person, of plain sense, could read her Bible, but had read little beside. Her knowledge of the world was nearly confined to the parish; for, I suppose, she was seldom, if ever, twelve miles from home in her life. She had known the Gospel about seven years before the Lord

visited her with a lingering consumption, which at length removed her to a better world. A few days before her death, I had been praying by her bed-side, and in my prayer I thanked the Lord that he gave her now to see that she had not followed cunningly-devised fables. When I had finished, she repeated that word, "No," she said, "not cunningly-devised fables: these are "realities indeed; I feel their truth; I feel their comfort. "O tell my friends, tell my acquaintance, tell inquiring "souls, tell poor sinners, tell all the daughters of Jeru- "salem, (alluding to Solomon's Song, v. 16. from which "she had just before desired me to preach at her fune- "ral,) what Jesus has done for my soul. Tell them, that "now, in the time of need, I find him my beloved and "my friend, and as such I commend him to them." She then fixed her eyes steadfastly upon me, and proceeded, as well as I can recollect, as follows: "Sir, "you are highly favoured in being called to preach the "Gospel. I have often heard you with pleasure; but "give me leave to tell you, that I now see all you "have said, or can say, is, comparatively, but little. "Nor till you come into my situation, and have death "and eternity full in your view, will it be possible for "you to conceive the vast weight and importance of "the truths you declare. Oh, sir, it is a serious thing "to die! No words can express what is needful to sup- "port the soul in the solemnity of a dying hour."

I believe it was the next day when I visited her again. After some discourse as usual, she said, with a remarkable vehemence of speech, "Are you sure I "cannot be mistaken?" I answered without hesitation, "Yes, I am sure; I am not afraid to say, my "soul for yours, that you are right." She paused a little, and then replied, "You say true; I know I am

"right. I feel that my hope is fixed upon the Rock of "ages: I know in whom I have believed. Yet if you "could see with my eyes, you would not wonder at my "question. But the approach of death presents a pro- "spect, which is till then hidden from us, and which "cannot be described." She said much more to the same purpose, and in all she spoke there was a dignity, weight, and evidence, which I suppose few professors of divinity, when lecturing from the chair, have at any time equalled. We may well say with Elihu, Who teacheth like him? Many instances of the like kind I have met with here. I have a poor girl near me, who looks like an ideot, and her natural capacity is indeed very small; but the Lord has been pleased to make her acquainted alternately with great temptations, and proportionably great discoveries of his love and truth. Sometimes, when her heart is enlarged, I listen to her with astonishment. I think no books or ministers I ever met with have given me such an impression and understanding of what the apostle styles τα βαθη του Θεου, as I have upon some occasions received from her conversation.

But I am rambling again. My attendance upon the sick is not always equally comfortable, but could I learn aright, it might be equally instructive. Some confirm the preciousness of a Saviour to me, by the cheerfulness with which, through faith in his name, they meet the king of terrors. Others no less confirm it, by the terror and reluctance they discover when they find they must die; for though there are too many who sadly slight the blessed Gospel while they are in health, yet in this place most are too far enlightened to be quite thoughtless about their souls, if they retain their senses

in their last illness. Then, like the foolish virgins, they say, Give us of your oil. Then they are willing that ministers and professors should pray with them, and speak to them. Through the Lord's goodness, several whom I have visited in these circumstances have afforded me good hope: they have been savingly changed by his blessing upon what has passed at the eleventh hour. I have seen a marvellous and blessed change take place in their language, views, and tempers, in a few days. I now visit a young person, who is cut short in her nineteenth year, by a consumption, and I think cannot live many days. I found her very ignorant and insensible, and she remained so a good while; but of late I hope her heart is touched. She feels her lost state, she seems to have some right desires, she begins to pray, and in such a manner as I cannot but hope the Lord is teaching her, and will reveal himself to her before she departs. But it is sometimes otherwise. I saw a young woman die last week: I had been often with her; but the night she was removed, she could only say, O, I cannot live! I cannot live! She repeated this mournful complaint as long as she could speak; for as the vital powers were more oppressed, her voice was changed into groans; her groans grew fainter and fainter, and in about a quarter of an hour after she had done speaking, she expired. Poor thing, I thought as I stood by her bed-side, if you were a duchess, in this situation, what could the world do for you now! I thought likewise how many things are there that now give us pleasure or pain, and assume a mighty importance in our view, which, in a dying hour, will be no more to us than the clouds which fly unnoticed over our heads. Then the truth of our Lord's aphorism will be

seen, felt, and acknowledged, "One thing is needful;" and we shall be ready to apply Grotius's dying confession to (alas!) a great part of our lives, *Ah vitam perdidi, nihil agendo laboriose.*

Your lordship allows me to send unpremeditated letters. I need not assure you this is one.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

My Lord, May 24, 1774.

WHAT a mercy is it to be separated in spirit, conversation, and interest, from the world that knows not God! Where all are alike by nature, grace makes a happy and unspeakable difference. Believers were once under the same influence of that spirit who still worketh in the children of disobedience, pursuing different paths, but all equally remote from truth and peace; some hatching cockatrice eggs, others weaving spiders' webs. These two general heads of mischief and vanity, include all the schemes, aims, and achievements of which man is capable, till God is pleased to visit the heart with his grace. The busy part of mankind are employed in multiplying evils and miseries; the more retired, speculative, and curious, are amusing themselves with what will hereafter appear as unsubstantial, unstable, and useless as a cobweb. Death will soon sweep away all that the philosophers, the virtuosi, the mathematicians, the antiquarians, and other learned triflers, are now weaving with so much self-applauded address. Nor will the fine-spun dresses, in which the moralist and the self-righteous clothe themselves, be of more advantage to them, either for ornament or defence, than the pro-

duce of a spider. But it is given to a few to know their present state and future destination. These build upon the immovable Rock of ages for eternity: these are trees springing from a living Root, and bear the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. These only are awake, while the rest of the world are in a sleep, indulging in vain dreams, from which likewise they will shortly awake; but, O with what consternation, when they shall find themselves irrecoverably divorced from all their delusive attachments, and compelled to appear before that God to whom they have lived strangers, and to whom they must give an account! O for a thousand tongues to proclaim in the ears of thoughtless mortals that important aphorism of our Lord, "One thing is needful!" Yet a thousand tongues would be, and are employed in vain, unless so far as the Lord is pleased to send the watchman's warning, by the power and agency of his own Spirit. I think the poet tells us, that Cassandra had the gift of truly foretelling future events; but she was afterwards laid under a painful embarrassment, that nobody would believe her words. Such, with respect to the bulk of their auditories, is the lot of Gospel-ministers: they are enlightened to see, and sent forth to declare, the awful consequences of sin; but, alas, how few believe their report! To illustrate our grief and disappointment, I sometimes suppose there was a dangerous water in the way of travellers, over which there is a bridge, which those who can be prevailed upon, may pass with safety. By the side of this bridge watchmen are placed, to warn passengers of the danger of the waters; to assure them, that all who attempt to go through them inevitably perish; to invite, entreat, and beseech them, if they value their lives, to cross the

bridge. Methinks this should be an easy task: yet if we should see, in fact, the greater part stopping their ears to the friendly importunity, many so much offended by it as to account the watchman's care impertinent, and only deserving of scorn and ill treatment, hardly one in fifty betaking themselves to the friendly bridge, the rest eagerly plunging into the waters, from which none return, as if they were determined to try who should be drowned first: this spectacle would be no unfit emblem of the reception the Gospel meets with from a blinded world. The ministers are rejected, opposed, vilified; they are accounted troublers of the world, because they dare not, cannot stand silent, while sinners are perishing before their eyes; and if, in the course of many sermons, they can prevail but on one soul to take timely warning, and to seek to Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, they may account it a mercy and an honour, sufficient to overbalance all the labour and reproaches they are called to endure. From the most they must expect no better reception than the Jews gave to Jeremiah, who told the prophet to his face, "As to the word thou hast spoken to us in the "name of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee at all; "but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth "out of our own mouth." Surely, if the Lord has given us any sense of the worth of our souls, any compassion towards them, this must be a painful exercise; and experience must teach us something of the meaning of Jeremiah's pathetic exclamation, "O that my "head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, "that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the "daughter of my people!" It is our *duty* to be thus affected. Our relief lies in the wisdom and sovereignty of God. He reveals his salvation to whom he pleases,

for the most part to babes; from the bulk of the wise and the prudent it is hidden. Thus it hath pleased him, and therefore it must be right. Yea, he will one day condescend to justify the propriety and equity of his proceedings to his creatures; then every mouth will be stopped, and none will be able to reply against their Judge. Light is come into the world, but men prefer darkness. They hate the light, resist it, and rebel against it. It is true, all do so; and therefore, if all were to perish under the condemnation, their ruin would be their own act. It is of grace that any are saved, and in the distribution of that grace, he does what he will with his own: a right which most are ready enough to claim in their own concerns, though they are so unwilling to allow it to the Lord of all. Many perplexing and acrimonious disputes have been started upon this subject; but the redeemed of the Lord are called, not to dispute, but to admire and rejoice; to love, adore, and obey. To know that he loved us, and gave himself for us, is the constraining argument and motive to love him, and surrender ourselves to him; to consider ourselves, as no longer our own, but to devote ourselves, with every faculty, power, and talent, to his service and glory. He deserves our all; for he parted with all for us. He made himself poor, he endured shame, torture, death, and the curse for us, that we through him might inherit everlasting life. Ah! the hardness of my heart, that I am no more affected, astonished, overpowered, with this thought!

I am, &c.

LETTER XV.

My Lord, April 20, 1774.

I HAVE been pondering a good while for a subject, and at last I begin without one, hoping that, (as it has often happened,) while I am writing one line, something will occur to fill up another. Indeed, I have an inexhaustible fund at hand; but it is to me often like a prize in the hand of a fool, I want skill to improve it. O for a warm, a suitable, a seasonable train of thought, that might enliven my own heart, and not be unworthy your lordship's perusal! Methinks the poets can have but cold comfort, when they invocate a fabled muse; but we have a warrant, a right, to look up for the influence of the Holy Spirit, who ordains strength for us, and has promised to work in us. What a comfort, what an honour is this, that worms have liberty to look up to God! and that he, the high and holy One who inhabiteth eternity, is pleased to look down upon us, to maintain our peace, to supply our wants, to guide us with his eye, and to inspire us with wisdom and grace suitable to our occasions! They who profess to know something of this intercourse, and to depend upon it, are, by the world, accounted enthusiasts, who know not what they mean; or perhaps hypocrites, who pretend to what they have not, in order to cover some base designs.—But we have reason to bear their reproaches with patience. Could the miser say,

———*Populus me sibilat, at mihi plaudo*
Ipse domi, simul ac nummos contemplor in arca.

Well then may the believer say, Let them laugh, let them rage, let them, if they please, point at me for a fool as I walk the streets: if I do but take up the Bible, or run over in my mind the inventory of the blessings with which the Lord has enriched me, I have sufficient amends. Jesus is mine; in him I have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, an interest in all the promises and in all the perfections of God; he will guide me by his counsel, support me by his power, comfort me with his presence, while I am here, and afterwards, when flesh and heart fail, he will receive me to his glory.

Let them say what they will, they shall not dispute or laugh us out of our spiritual senses. If all the blind men in the kingdom should endeavour to bear me down, that the sun is not bright, or that the rainbow has no colours, I would still believe my own eyes. I have seen them both; they have not. I cannot prove to their satisfaction what I assert, because they are destitute of sight, the necessary medium; yet their exceptions produce no uncertainty in my mind: they would not, they could not hesitate a moment, if they were not blind. Just so, they who have been taught of God, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, have an experimental perception of the truth, which renders them proof against all the sophistry of infidels. I am persuaded we have many plain people here, who, if a wise man of the world was to suggest that the Bible is a human invention, would be quite at a loss how to answer him by arguments drawn from external evidences; yet they have found such effects from this blessed book, that they would be no more moved by the insinuation than if they were told, that a cunning man, or set of men, invented the sun, and placed it in the firmament. So,

if a wise Socinian was to tell them that the Saviour was only a man like themselves, they would conceive just such an opinion of his skill in divinity, as a philosopher would do of a clown's skill in astronomy, who should affirm that the sun was no bigger than a cart-wheel.

It remains therefore a truth, in defiance of all the cavils of the ignorant, that the Holy Spirit does influence the hearts of all the children of God, or in other words, they are inspired, not with new revelations, but with grace and wisdom, to understand, apply, and feed upon the great things already revealed in the Scriptures, without which the Scriptures are as useless as spectacles to the blind. Were it not so, when we become acquainted with the poverty, ignorance, and wickedness of our hearts, we must sit down in utter despair of being ever able to think a good thought, to offer a single petition aright in prayer, or to take one safe step in the path of life. But now we may be content with our proper weakness, since the power and spirit of Christ are engaged to rest upon us; and while we are preserved in a simple dependence upon this help, though unable of ourselves to do any thing, we shall find an ability to do every thing that our circumstances and duty call for. What is weaker than a worm? Yet the Lord's worms shall, in his strength, thresh the mountains, and make the hills as chaff. But this life of faith, this living and acting by a power above our own, is an inexplicable mystery, till experience makes it plain. I have often wondered that St. Paul has obtained so much quarter at the hands of some people, as to pass with them for a man of sense; for surely the greatest part of his writings must be, to the last degree,

absurd and unintelligible upon their principles. How many contradictions must they find, for instance, if they give any attention to what they read in that one passage, Gal. ii. 20. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

And as believers are thus inspired by the Holy Spirit, who furnishes them with desires, motives, and abilities, to perform what is agreeable to his will; so I apprehend, that they who live without God in the world, whom the apostle styles *sensual, not having the Spirit*, are, in a greater or less degree, *ad captum recipientis*, under what I may call a *black inspiration.*— After making the best allowances I can, both for the extent of human genius, and the deplorable evil of the human heart, I cannot suppose that one half of the wicked wit, of which some persons are so proud, is properly their own. Perhaps such a one as Voltaire would neither have written, or have been read or admired so much, if he had not been the amanuensis of an abler hand in his own way. Satan is always near when the heart is disposed to receive him; and the Lord withdraws his restraints, to heighten the sinner's ability of sinning with an *éclat*, and assisting him with such strokes of blasphemy, malice, and falsehood, as perhaps he could not otherwise have attained. Therefore I do not wonder that they are clever and smart, that they raise a laugh, and are received with applause among those who are like-minded with themselves. But unless the Lord is pleased to grant them repentance, (though it is rather to be feared some of them are given

up to judicial hardness of heart,) how much better would it have been for them had they been born idiots or lunatics, than to be distinguished as the willing, industrious, and successful instruments of the powers of darkness, in beguiling, perverting, and ruining the souls of men! Alas, what are parts and talents, or any distinctions which give pre-eminence in life, unless they are sanctified by the grace of God, and directed to the accomplishment of his will and glory! From the expression, *Bind them in bundles and burn them,* I have been led to think, that the deceivers and the deceived, they who have prostituted their gifts or influence to encourage others in sin, and they who have perished by their means, may, in another world, have some peculiar and inseparable connexion, and spend an eternity in fruitless lamentations, that ever they were connected here.

Your lordship, I doubt not, feels the force of that line,

O to grace how great a debtor!——

Had not the Lord separated you for himself, your rank, your abilities, your influence, which now you chiefly value as enlarging your opportunities of usefulness, might, nay certainly would, have been diverted into the opposite channel.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVI.

My Lord, November 5, 1774.

I HAVE not very lately had recourse to the expedient of descanting upon a text, but I believe it the best method I can take to avoid ringing changes upon a few obvious topics, which I suppose uniformly present themselves to my mind when I am about to write to your lordship. Just now that sweet expression of David occurred to my thoughts, *The Lord is my Shepherd!* Permit me, without plan or premeditation, to make a few observations upon it; and may your lordship feel the peace, the confidence, the blessedness, which a believing application of the words is suited to inspire.

The Socinians, and others, in their unhappy laboured attempts to darken the principal glory and foundation-comfort of the Gospel, employ their critical sophistry against those texts which expressly and doctrinally declare the Redeemer's character; and affect to triumph, if in any manuscript or ancient version they can find a variation from the received copies which seems to favour their cause. But we may venture to wave the authority of every disputed or disputable text, and maintain the truth against their cavils, from the current language and tenor of the whole Scripture. David's words in Psalm xxiii. are alone a decisive proof that Jesus is Jehovah, if they will but allow two things, which I think they cannot deny;—1. That our Saviour assumes to himself the character of the Shepherd of his people;—and 2. That he did not come into the world to abridge those advantages which the servants of God enjoyed before his incarnation. Upon these premises, which cannot be

gainsayed without setting aside the whole New Testament, the conclusion is undeniable: for if Jehovah was David's Shepherd, unless Jesus be Jehovah, we who live under the Gospel have an unspeakable disadvantage, in being intrusted to the care of one who, according to the Socinians, is a mere man; and, upon the Arian scheme, is at the most a creature, and infinitely short of possessing those perfections which David contemplated in his Shepherd. He had a Shepherd whose wisdom and power were infinite, and might therefore warrantably conclude he should not want, and need not fear. And we also may conclude the same, if our Shepherd be the Lord or Jehovah, but not otherwise. Besides, the very nature of the Shepherd's office respecting the state of such frail creatures as we are, requires those attributes for the due discharge of it, which are incommunicably divine. He must intimately know every individual of the flock.—His eye must be upon them every one, and his ear open to their prayers, and his arm stretched out for their relief, in all places and in all ages.—Every thought of every heart must be open to his view, and his wisdom must penetrate, and his arm control and over-rule all the hidden and complicated machinations of the powers of darkness.—He must have the administration of universal providence over all the nations, families, and persons upon earth, or he could not effectually manage for those who put their trust in him, in that immense variety of cases and circumstances in which they are found. Reason, as well as Scripture, may convince us, that he who gathereth the outcasts of Israel, who healeth the broken in heart, who upholdeth all that fall, raiseth up all that are bowed down, and upon whom the eyes of all wait for their support, can be no other than he who telleth the number

of the stars, and calleth them all by their names; who is great in power, and whose understanding is infinite. To this purpose likewise the prophet Isaiah describes this mighty Shepherd, chap. xl. 9—17. both as to his person and office.

But is not this indeed the great mystery of godliness! How just is the apostle's observation, that no man can say, Jesus Christ is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost! How astonishing the thought,—that the Maker of heaven and earth, the Holy One of Israel, before whose presence the earth shook, the heavens dropped, when he displayed a faint emblem of his Majesty upon Sinai, should afterwards appear in the form of a servant, and hang upon a cross, the sport and scorn of wicked men! I cannot wonder that to the wise men of the world this appears absurd, unreasonable, and impossible; yet to right reason, to reason enlightened and sanctified, however amazing the proposition be, yet it appears true and necessary, upon a supposition, that a holy God is pleased to pardon sinners in a way suited to display the awful glories of his justice. The same arguments which prove the blood of bulls and goats insufficient to take away sin, will conclude against the utmost doings or sufferings of men or angels. The Redeemer of sinners must be mighty; he must have a personal dignity to stamp such a value upon his undertakings, as that thereby God may appear just, as well as merciful, in justifying the ungodly for his sake; and he must be all-sufficient to bless, and almighty to protect, those who come unto him for safety and life.

Such a one is our Shepherd. This is he of whom we, through grace, are enabled to say, we are *his* people, and the sheep of *his* pasture. We are his by every tie and right; he made us, he redeemed us, he reclaimed

us from the hand of our enemies, and we are his by our own voluntary surrender of ourselves; for though we once slighted, despised, and opposed him, he made us willing in the day of his power: he knocked at the door of our hearts; but we, (at least I,) barred and fastened it against him as much and as long as possible. But when he revealed his love, we could stand out no longer. Like sheep, we are weak, destitute, defenceless, prone to wander, unable to return, and always surrounded with wolves. But all is made up in the fulness, ability, wisdom, compassion, care, and faithfulness of our great Shepherd. He guides, protects, feeds, heals, and restores, and will be our guide and our God even until death. Then he will meet us, receive us, and present us unto himself, and we shall be near him, and like him, and with him for ever.

Ah! my lord, what a subject is this! I trust it is the joy of your heart. Placed as you are by his hand in a superior rank, you see and feel that the highest honours, and the most important concernments that terminate with the present life, are trivial as the sports of children, in comparison with the views and the privileges you derive from the glorious Gospel; and your situation in life renders the grace bestowed upon you the more conspicuous and distinguishing. I have somewhere met with a similar reflection of Henry the Fourth of France, to this purpose, that though many came into the world the same day with him, he was probably the only one among them that was born to be a king. Your lordship is acquainted with many, who, if not born on the same day with you, were born to titles, estates, and honours; but how few of them were born to the honour of making a public and consistent profession of the glorious Gospel! The hour is coming, when all

honours and possessions, but this which cometh of God only, will be eclipsed and vanish; and, "like the base-"less fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind." How miserable will they then be, who must leave their *all!* What a mortifying thought does Horace put in the way of those who disdain to read the Scripture?

Liquenda tellus, et domus, et placens
Uxor: neque harum, quas colis, arborum
Te, præter invisas cupressos,
Ulla brevem dominum sequetur.

But grace and faith can make the lowest state of life supportable, and make a dismission from the highest desirable. Of the former I have many living proofs and witnesses around me. Your lordship, I trust, will have sweet experience of the latter, when, after having fulfilled the will of God in your generation, you shall be called, (I hope in some yet distant day,) to enter into your Master's joy. In the mean time, how valuable are life, talents, influence, and opportunities of every kind, if we are enabled to improve and lay out all for him who has thus loved us, thus provided for us! As to myself, I would hope there are few who have so clear a sense of their obligations to him, who make such unsuitable and languid returns as I do. I think I have a desire to serve him better; but, alas! evil is present with me. Surely I shall feel something like shame and regret for my coldness, even in heaven;—for I find I am never happier than when I am most ashamed of myself upon this account here.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVII.

My Lord, December 8, 1774.

HOW wonderful is the patience of God towards sinful men! In him they live, and move, and have their being; and if he were to withdraw his support for a single moment, they must perish. He maintains their lives, guards their persons, supplies their wants, while they employ the powers and faculties they receive from him in a settled course of opposition to his will. They trample upon his laws, affront his government, and despise his grace; yet still he spares. To silence all his adversaries in a moment, would require no extraordinary exertion of his power; but his forbearance towards them manifests his glory, and gives us cause to say, Who is a God like unto thee?

Sometimes, however, there are striking instances of his displeasure against sin. When such events take place, immediately upon a public and premeditated contempt offered to Him that sitteth in the heavens; I own they remind me of the danger of standing, if I may so speak, in the Lord's way; for though his long-suffering is astonishing, and many dare him to his face daily, with seeming impunity; yet he sometimes strikes an awful and unexpected blow, and gives an illustration of that solemn word, "Who ever hardened him-"self against the Lord and prospered?" But who am I, to make this observation? I ought to do it with the deepest humiliation, remembering that I once stood, (according to my years and ability,) in the foremost rank of his avowed opposers; and with a determined and unwearied enmity, renounced, defied, and blasphemed

him. "But he will have mercy on whom he will have "mercy;" and therefore I was spared, and reserved to speak of his goodness.

Josephus, when speaking of the death of Herod Agrippa, ascribes it to a natural cause, and says, he was seized with excruciating pains in his bowels. But Luke informs us of the *true* cause: an angel of the Lord smote him. Had we a modern history, written by an inspired pen, we should probably often be reminded of such an interposition where we are not ordinarily aware of it. For though the springs of actions and events are concealed from us for the most part, and vain men carry on their schemes with confidence, as though the Lord had forsaken the earth; yet they are under his eye and control; and faith, in some measure, instructed by the specimens of his government recorded in the Scripture, can trace and admire his hand, and can see how he takes the wise in their own craftiness, stains the pride of human glory; and that when sinners speak proudly, he is above them, and makes every thing bend or break before him.

While we lament the growth and pernicious effects of infidelity, and see how wicked men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived; what gratitude should fill our hearts to him, who has been pleased to call us out of the horrid darkness in which multitudes are bewildered and lost, into the glorious light of his Gospel? Faint are our warmest conceptions of this mercy. In order to understand it fully, we should have a full and adequate sense of the evil from which we are delivered; the glory to which we are called; and especially of the astonishing means to which we owe our life and hope, the humiliation, sufferings, and death of the Son of God. But our views of these

points, while in our present state, are and must be exceedingly weak and disproportionate. We know them but in part, we see them δι εσοπτρου, by *reflection*, rather the images than the things themselves; and though they are faithfully represented in the mirror of God's word, to us they appear indistinct, because we see them through a gross medium of ignorance and unbelief. Hereafter every vail shall be removed; we shall know, in another manner than we do now, the unspeakable evil of sin, and the unsupportable dreadfulness of God's displeasure against it, when we see the world in flames, and hear the final sentence denounced upon the ungodly. We shall have far other thoughts of Jesus when we see him as he is; and shall then be able to make a more affecting estimate of the love which moved him to be made a substitute and a curse for us; and we shall then know what great things God has prepared for them that love him. Then with transport we shall adopt the queen of Sheba's language, It was a true report we heard in yonder dark world; but behold the half, the thousandth part, was not told us! In the mean time, may such conceptions as we are enabled to form of these great truths, fill our hearts, and be mingled with all our thoughts, and all our concerns; may the Lord, by faith, give us an abiding evidence of the reality and importance of the things which cannot yet be seen: so shall we be enabled to live above the world while we are in it, uninfluenced either by its blandishments or its frowns, and, with a noble simplicity and singularity, avow and maintain the cause of God in truth, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. He whom we serve is able to support and protect us; and he well deserves, at our hands, that we should be willing to endure, for his sake, much more than he will ever permit us to be

exercised with. The believer's call, duty, and privilege, is beautifully and forcibly set forth in Milton's character of Abdiel, at the end of the Fifth Book:

> ———Faithful found
> Among the faithless, faithful only he:
> Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
> Unshaken, unseduc'd, unterrified,
> His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;
> Nor number, nor example, with him wrought
> To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
> Though single.———

Methinks your lordship's situation particularly resembles that in which the poet has placed Abdiel.—You are not indeed called to serve God quite alone; but amongst those of your own rank, and with whom the station in which he has placed you necessitates you to converse, how few are there who can understand, second, or approve, the principles upon which you act, or easily bear a conduct which must impress conviction, or reflect dishonour upon themselves! But you are not alone; the Lord's people, (many of whom you will not know till you meet them in glory,) are helping you here with their prayers; his angels are commissioned to guard and guide your steps; yea, the Lord himself fixes his eye of mercy upon your private and your public path, and is near you at your right hand, that you may not be moved! That he may comfort you with the light of his countenance, and uphold you with the arm of his power, is my frequent prayer.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

My Lord, January 20, 1775.

WE have entered upon another year!—So have thousands, perhaps millions, who will not see it close! An alarming thought to the worldling! at least it should be so. I have an imperfect remembrance of an account I read, when I was a boy, of an ice palace, built one winter at Petersburgh. The walls, the roof, the floors, the furniture, were all of ice, but finished with taste: and every thing that might be expected in a royal palace was to be found there; the ice, while in the state of water, being previously coloured, so that to the eye all seemed formed of proper materials; but all was cold, useless, and transient. Had the frost continued till now, the palace might have been standing; but with the returning spring it melted away, like the baseless fabric of a vision. Methinks there should have been one stone in the building, to have retained the inscription *Sic transit gloria mundi!* for no contrivance could exhibit a fitter illustration of the vanity of human life. Men build and plan as if their work were to endure for ever; but the wind passes over them, and they are gone. In the midst of all their preparations, or at furthest when they think they have just completed their designs, their breath goeth forth, they return to their earth; in that very day their thoughts perish.

How many sleep who kept the world awake!

Yet this ice house had something of a leisurely dissolution; though, when it began to decay, all the art of man was unable to prop it; but often death comes hastily,

and, like the springing of a mine, destroys to the very foundations without previous notice. Then all we have been concerned in here,(all but the consequences of our conduct, which will abide to eternity,) will be no more to us than the remembrance of a dream. This truth is too plain to be denied; but the greater part of mankind act as if they were convinced it was false: they spend their days in vanity, and in a moment they go down to the grave. What cause of thankfulness have they who are delivered from this delusion, and who, by the knowledge of the glorious Gospel, have learned their true state and end, are saved from the love of the present world, from the heart-distressing fear of death; and know, that if their earthly house were *dissolved* like the ice palace, they have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Yet even these are much concerned to realize the brevity and uncertainty of their present state, that they may be stimulated to make the most and the best of it; to redeem their time, and manage their precarious opportunities, so as may most tend to the praise and glory of him who has called them out of darkness into marvellous light. Why should any that have tasted that the Lord is gracious wish to live another day, but that they may have the honour to be fellow-workers with him, instrumental in promoting his designs, and of laying themselves out to the utmost of their abilities and influence in his service! To enjoy a sense of his loving kindness, and to have the light of his countenance lifted up upon our souls, is indeed, respecting ourselves, the best part of life, yea, better than life itself; but this we shall have to unspeakably greater advantage when we have finished our course, and shall be wholly freed from the body of sin. And therefore the *great desirable* while

here seems to be grace, that we may *serve* him and *suffer* for him in the world. Though our first wish immediately upon our own accounts might be, to depart and be with Jesus, which is πολλω μαλλον κρεισσον, yet a lively thought of our immense obligations to his redeeming love, may reconcile us to a much longer continuance here, if we may by any means be subservient to diffuse the glory of his name, and the blessings of his salvation, which is God's great and principal end in preserving the world itself. When historians and politicians descant upon the rise and fall of empires, with all their professed sagacity, in tracing the connexion between causes and effects, they are totally unacquainted with the great master-wheel which manages the whole movement; that is, the Lord's design in favour of his church and kingdom. To this every event is subordinate; to this every interfering interest must stoop. How easily might this position be proved, by reviewing the history of the period about the Reformation. Whether Dr. Robertson considers things in this light, in his history of Charles V. I know not, as I have not seen his books; but if not, however elaborate his performance may be in other respects, I must venture to say, it is essentially defective, and cannot give that light and pleasure to a spiritual reader of which the subject is capable. And I doubt not but some who are yet unborn will hereafter clearly see and remark, that the present unhappy disputes between Great Britain and America, with their consequences, whatever they may be, are part of a series of events, of which the extension and interests of the church of Christ were the principal final causes. In a word, that Jesus may be known, trusted, and adored, and sinners, by the power of his Gospel, be rescued from sin and Satan, is comparatively the το εν—the one great

business, for the sake of which the succession of day and night, summer and winter, is still maintained; and when the plan of redemption is consummated, sin, which now almost fills the earth, will then set it on fire; and the united interest of all the rest of mankind, when detached from that of the people of God, will not plead for its preservation a single day. In this view, I congratulate your lordship, that however your best endeavours to serve the temporal interests of the nation may fall short of your wishes; yet, so far as your situation gives you opportunity of supporting the Gospel-cause, and facilitating its progress, you have a prospect both of a more certain and more important success. For instance, it was, under God, your lordship's favour and influence that brought me into the ministry. And though I be nothing, yet he who put it into your heart to patronize me, has been pleased not to suffer what you then did for his sake to be wholly in vain. He has been pleased, in a course of years, by so unworthy an instrument as I am, to awaken a number of persons, who were at that time dead in trespasses and sins; but now some of them are pressing on to the prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus; and some of them are already before the throne. Should I suggest in some companies, that the conversion of a hundred sinners, (more or less,) to God is an event of more real importance than the *temporal* prosperity of the greatest nation upon earth, I should be charged with ignorance and arrogance; but your lordship is skilled in Scriptural arithmetic, which alone can teach us to estimate the value of souls, and will agree with me, that one soul is worth more than the whole world, on account of its redemption-price, its vast capacities, and its duration. Should we suppose a nation to consist of forty millions, the whole and each

individual to enjoy as much good as this life can afford, without abatement, for a term of fifty years each; all this good, or an equal quantity, might be exhausted by a single person in two thousand million of years, which would be but a moment in comparison of the eternity which would still follow. And if this good were merely temporal good, the whole aggregate of it would be evil and misery, if compared with that happiness in God, of which only they who are made partakers of a divine life are capable. On the other hand, were a whole nation to be destroyed by such accumulated miseries as attended the seige of Jerusalem, the sum-total of these calamities would be but trifling, if set in competition with what every single person that dies in sin has to expect, when the sentence of everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power, shall be executed.

What an unexpected round have my thoughts taken since I set out from the ice palace! It is time to relieve your lordship, and to subscribe myself, &c.

LETTER XIX.

My Lord, February 23, 1775.

I ASSENT to our Lord's declaration, "Without me "ye can do nothing;" not only upon the authority of the speaker, but from the same irresistible and experimental evidence, as if he had told me, that I cannot make the sun to shine, or change the course of the seasons. Though my pen and my tongue sometimes move freely, yet the total incapacity and stagnation of thought I labour under at other times, convinces me, that in myself I have not sufficiency to think a good

thought; and I believe the case would be the same, if that little measure of knowledge and abilities, which I am too prone to look upon as my own, were a thousand times greater than it is. For every new service I stand in need of a new supply, and can bring forth nothing of my supposed store into actual exercise, but by his immediate assistance. His gracious influence is that to those who are best furnished with gifts, which the water is to the mill, or the wind to the ship, without which the whole apparatus is motionless and useless. I apprehend that we lose much of the comfort which might arise from a sense of our continual dependence upon him, and, of course, fall short of acknowledging, as we ought, what we receive from him, by mistaking the manner of his operation. Perhaps we take it too much for granted, that communications from himself must bear some kind of sensible impression that they are *his*, and therefore are ready to give our own industry or ingenuity credit for those performances in which we can perceive no such impression: yet it is very possible that we may be under his influence when we are least aware: and though what we say, or write, or do, may seem no way extraordinary: yet that we should be led to such a particular turn of thought at one time rather than at another, has, in my own concerns, often appeared to me remarkable, from the circumstances which have attended, or the consequences which have followed. How often, in the choice of a text, or in the course of a sermon, or in a letter to a friend, have I been led to speak a word in season! and what I have expressed at large, and in general, has been so exactly suited to some case which I was utterly unacquainted with, that I could hardly have hit it so well, had I been previously informed of it. Some instances of this kind

have been so striking, as hardly to admit a doubt of superior agency. And indeed, if believers in Jesus, however unworthy in themselves, are the temples of the Holy Ghost; if the Lord lives, dwells, and walks in them; if he is their life and their light; if he has promised to guide them with his eye, and to work in them to will and to do of his own good pleasure; methinks what I have mentioned, and more, may be reasonably expected. That line in the hymn,

Help I every moment need,

is not a hyperbolical expression, but strictly and literally true, not only in great emergencies, but in our smoother hours, and most familiar paths. This gracious assistance is afforded in a way imperceptible to ourselves, to hide pride from us, and to prevent us from being indolent and careless with respect to the use of appointed means; and it would be likewise more abundantly, and perhaps more sensibly afforded, were our spirits more simple in waiting upon the Lord. But, alas! a divided heart, an undue attachment to some temporal object sadly deadens *our* spirits, (I speak for myself,) and grieves the Lord's Spirit; so that we walk in darkness and at a distance, and though called to great privileges, live far below them. But methinks the thought of him who is always near, and upon whom we do and must incessantly depend, should suggest a powerful motive for the closest attention to his revealed will, and the most punctual compliance with it; for so far as the Lord withdraws, we become as blind men, and with the clearest light, and upon the plainest ground, we are liable, or rather sure, to stumble at every step.

Though there is a principle of consciousness, and a

determination of the will, sufficient to denominate our thoughts and performances our own; yet I believe mankind in general are more under an invisible agency than they apprehend. The Lord, immediately from himself, and perhaps by the ministry of his holy angels, guides, prompts, restrains, or warns his people. So there undoubtedly is what I may call a *black inspiration,* the influence of the evil spirits who work in the hearts of the disobedient, and not only excite their wills, but assist their faculties, and qualify as well as incline them to be more assiduously wicked, and more extensively mischievous, than they could be of themselves. I consider Voltaire, for instance, and many writers of the same stamp, to be little more than secretaries and amanuenses of one who has unspeakably more wit and adroitness in promoting infidelity and immorality, than they of themselves can justly pretend to. They have, for a while, the credit, (if I may so call it,) of the fund from whence they draw; but the world little imagines who is the real and original author of that philosophy and poetry, of those fine turns and sprightly inventions, which are so generally admired. Perhaps many, now applauded for their genius, would have been comparatively dolts, had they not been engaged in a cause which Satan has so much interest in supporting.

But to return to the more pleasing subject. How great and honourable is the privilege of a true believer! That he has neither wisdom nor strength in himself, is no disadvantage; for he is connected with infinite wisdom and almighty power. Though weak as a worm, his arms are strengthened by the mighty God of Jacob, and all things become possible, yea, easy to him, that occur within the compass of his proper duty and calling. The

Lord, whom he serves, engages to proportion his strength to his day, whether it be a day of service or of suffering; and though he be fallible and short-sighted, exceeding liable to mistake and imposition; yet, while he retains a sense that he is so, and with the simplicity of a child asks counsel and direction of the Lord, he seldom takes a wrong step, at least not in matters of consequence; and even his inadvertencies are overruled for good. If he forgets his true state, and thinks himself to be something, he presently finds he is indeed nothing; but if he is content to be nothing, and to have nothing, he is sure to find a seasonable and abundant communication of all that he wants. Thus he lives, like Israel in the wilderness, upon mere bounty; but then it is a bounty unchangeable, unwearied, inexhaustible, and all-sufficient. Moses, when speaking of the methods the Lord took to humble Israel, mentions his feeding them with manna, as one method. I could not understand this for a time. I thought they were rather in danger of being proud, when they saw themselves provided for in such an extraordinary way. But the manna would not keep; they could not hoard it up, and were therefore in a state of absolute dependence from day to day: this appointment was well suited to humble them. Thus it is with us in spirituals. We should be better pleased, perhaps, to be set up with a stock or sufficiency at once, such an inherent portion of wisdom and power, as we might depend upon, at least for common occasions, without being constrained by a sense of indigence, to have continual recourse to the Lord for every thing we want. But his way is best. His own glory is most displayed, and our safety best secured, by keeping us quite poor and empty in ourselves, and supplying us from one minute to an-

other, according to our need. This, if any thing, will prevent boasting, and keep a sense of gratitude awake in our hearts. This is well adapted to quicken us to prayer, and furnishes us with a thousand occasions for praise, which would otherwise escape our notice.

But who or what are we, that the Most High should thus notice us! should visit us every morning, and water us every moment! It is an astonishing thought, that God should thus dwell with men! that he, before whom the mightiest earthly potentates are less than nothing and vanity, should thus stoop and accommodate himself to the situation, wants, and capacities of the weakest, meanest, and poorest of his children! But so it hath pleased him. He seeth not as man seeth.

I am, &c.

LETTER XX.

My Lord, August—1775.

I HAVE no apt preface or introduction at hand, and as I have made it almost a rule not to study for what I should offer your lordship, I therefore beg leave to begin abruptly. It is the future promised privilege of believers in Jesus, that they shall be as the angels; and there is a sense in which we should endeavour to be as the angels now. This is intimated to us where we are taught to pray, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. I have sometimes amused myself with supposing an angel should be appointed to reside awhile upon earth in a human body; not in sinful flesh like ours, but in a body free from infirmity, and still preserving an unabated sense of his own happiness in the

favour of God, and of his unspeakable obligation to his goodness; and then I have tried to judge, as well as I could, how such an angel would comport himself in such a situation. I know not that I ever enlarged upon the thought, either in preaching or writing. Permit me to follow it a little in this paper.

Were I acquainted with this heavenly visitant, I am willing to hope I should greatly reverence him; and, if permitted, be glad, in some cases, to consult him: in some, but not in all; for I think my fear would be equal to my love. Methinks I could never venture to open my heart freely to him, and unfold to him my numberless complaints and infirmities; for, as he could have no experience of the like things himself, I should suppose he would not know how fully to pity me; indeed, hardly how to bear with me, if I told him at all. Alas! what a preposterous, strange, vile creature should I appear to an angel, if he knew me as I am! It is well for me, that Jesus was made lower than the angels, and that the human nature he assumed was not distinct from the common nature of mankind, though secured from the common depravity; and because he submitted to be under the law in our name and stead, though he was free from sin himself, yet sin, and its consequences, being, (for our sakes,) charged upon him, he acquired, in the days of his humiliation, an experimental sympathy with his poor people. He knows the effects of sin and temptation upon us, by that knowledge whereby he knows all things; but he knows them likewise in a way more suitable for our comfort and relief, by the sufferings and exercises he passed through for us. Hence arises encouragement. We have not an high priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but was, in all points, tempted even as we are. When I

add to this, the consideration of his power, promises, and grace, and that he is exalted on purpose to pity, relieve, and save, I gather courage. With him I dare be free, and am not sorry, but glad, that he knows me perfectly, that not a thought of my heart is hidden from him. For without this infinite and exact knowledge of my disease, how could he effectually administer to my cure? But whither am I rambling? I seem to have lost sight of the angel already. I am now coming back, that if he cannot effectually pity me, he may at least animate and teach me.

In the first place, I take it for granted this angel would think himself a stranger and pilgrim upon earth. He would not forget that his πολιτευμα was in heaven. Surely he would look upon all the bustle of human life, (further than the design of his mission might connect him with it,) with more indifference than we look upon the sports of children, or the amusements of idiots and lunatics, which give us an uneasiness, rather than excite a desire of joining in them. He would judge of every thing around him, by the reference and tendency it had to promote the will of him that sent him; and the most specious or splendid appearances, considered in any other view, would make no impression upon him.

Consequently, as to his own concernment, all his aim and desire would be to fulfil the will of God. All situations would be alike to him; whether he was commanded, as in the case of Sennacherib, to destroy a mighty army with a stroke; or, as in the case of Hagar, to attend upon a woman, a servant, a slave; both services would be to him equally honourable and important, because he was in both equally pleasing his Lord, which would be his element and his joy, whether

he was appointed to guide the reins of empire, or to sweep the streets.

Again, the angel would doubtless exhibit a striking example of benevolence; for being free from selfish bias, filled with a sense of the love of God, and a knowledge of his adorable perfections; his whole heart, and soul, and strength, would be engaged and exerted, both from duty and inclination, to relieve the miseries, and advance the happiness of all around him; and in this he would follow the pattern of him who doeth good to all, commanding his sun to rise, and his rain to fall, upon the just and the unjust; though, from the same pattern, he would show an especial regard to the household of faith. An angel would take but little part in the controversies, contentions, and broils, which might happen in the time of his sojourning here, but would be a friend to all, so far as consistent with the general good.

The will and glory of God being the angel's great view, and having a more lively sense of the realities of an unseen world than we can at present conceive, he would certainly, in the first and chief place, have the success and spread of the glorious Gospel at heart. Angels, though not redeemed with blood, yet feel themselves nearly concerned in the work of redemption. They admire its mysteries. We may suppose them well informed in the works of creation and providence. But, (unlike too many men, who are satisfied with the knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, or history,) they search and pry into the counsels of redeeming love, rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, and think themselves well employed to be ministering spirits, to minister to the heirs of salvation. It would therefore be his chief delight to espouse and promote their cause, and

to employ all his talents and influence in spreading the savour and knowledge of the name of Jesus, which is the only and effectual means of bringing sinners out of bondage and darkness, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Lastly, Though his zeal for the glory of his Lord would make him willing to continue here till he had finished the work given him to do, he would, I am persuaded, look forward with desire to the appointed moment of his recall, that he might be freed from beholding and mixing with the sin and vanity of those who know not God, render his account with joy, and be welcomed to heaven with a—Well done, good and faithful servant. Surely he would long for this, as a labourer for the setting sun; and would not form any connexion with the things of time, which should prompt him to wish his removal protracted for a single hour beyond the period of his prescribed service.

Alas! why am not I more like an angel? My views in my better judgment are the same. My motives and obligations are even stronger; an angel is not so deeply indebted to the grace of God, as a believing sinner, who was once upon the brink of destruction, has been redeemed with blood, and might justly have been, before now, shut up with the powers of darkness without hope! Yet the merest trifles are sufficient to debase my views, damp my activity, and impede my endeavours in the Lord's service, though I profess to have no other end or desire which can make a continuance in life worthy my wish.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXI.

My Lord, November—1775.

DUM loquimur tempus fugit. In the midst of the hurries and changes of this unsettled state, we glide along swiftly towards an unchangeable world, and shall soon have as little connexion with the scenes we are now passing through, as we have with what happened before the flood. All that appears great and interesting in the present life, abstracted from its influence upon our internal character, and our everlasting allotment, will soon be as unreal as the visions of the night. This we know and confess; but though our judgments are convinced, it is seldom our hearts are duly affected by the thought. And while I find it easy to write in this moralizing strain, I feel myself disposed to be seriously engaged about trifles, and trifling in the most serious concerns, as if I believed the very contrary. It is with good reason the Lord challenges, as his own prerogative, the full knowledge of the deceitfulness, desperate wickedness, and latent depths of the human heart, which is capable of making even his own people so shamefully inconsistent with themselves, and with their acknowledged principles.

I find that, when I have something agreeable in expectation, (suppose, for instance, it were a few hours conversation with your lordship,) my imagination paints and prepares the scene before hand, hurries me over the intervening space of time, as though it were a useless blank, and anticipates the pleasure I propose. Many of my thoughts of this kind are mere waking dreams; for perhaps the opportunity I am eagerly

waiting for never happens, but is swallowed up by some unforeseen disappointment; or if not, something from within or without, prevents its answering the idea I had formed of it. Nor does my fancy confine itself within the narrow limits of probabilities; it can busy itself as eagerly in ranging after chimeras and impossibilities, and engage my attention to the ideal pursuit of things which are never likely to happen. In these respects my imagination travels with wings; so that if the wildness, the multiplicity, the variety of the phantoms which pass through my mind in the space of a winter's day, were known to my fellow-creatures, they would probably deem me, as I am often ready to deem myself, but a more sober and harmless kind of lunatic. But if I endeavour to put this active roving power in a right track, and to represent to myself those scenes, which, though not yet present, I know will soon be realized, and have a greatness, which the most enlarged exercise of my powers cannot comprehend: if I would fix my thoughts upon the hour of death, the end of the world, the coming of the Judge, or similar subjects; then my imagination is presently tame, cold, and jaded, travels very slowly, and is soon wearied in the road of truth; though in the fairy fields of uncertainty and folly it can skip from mountain to mountain. Mr. Addison supposes, that the imagination alone, as it can be differently affected, is capable of making us either inconceivably happy or miserable. I am sure it is capable of making us miserable, though I believe it seldom gives us much pleasure, but such as is to be found in a fool's paradise. But I am sure, were my outward life and conduct perfectly free from blame, the disorders and defilement of my imagination are sufficient to constitute me a chief sinner, in the sight of him to

whom the thoughts and intents of the heart are continually open, and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

Upon this head I cannot but lament how universally almost, education is suited, and as it were designed, to add to the stimulus of depraved nature. A cultivated imagination is commended and sought after as a very desirable talent, though it seldom means more than the possession of a large stock of other people's dreams and fables, with a certain quickness in compounding them, enlarging upon them, and exceeding them by inventions of our own. Poets, painters, and even historians, are employed to assist us from our early years, in forming an habitual relish for shadows and colourings, which both indispose for the search of truth, and even unfit us for its reception, unless proposed just in our own way. The best effect of the Belles Lettres upon the imagination seems generally expressed by the word Taste. And what is this taste, but a certain disposition which loves to be humoured, soothed, and flattered, and which can hardly receive or bear the most important truths, if they be not decorated and set off with such a delicacy and address as taste requires. I say *the most important truths;* because truths of a secular importance strike so closely upon the senses, that the decision of taste perhaps is not waited for. Thus, if a man be informed of the birth of his child, or that his house is on fire, the message takes up his thoughts, and he is seldom much disgusted with the manner in which it is delivered. But what an insuperable bar is the refined taste of many, to their profiting by the preaching of the Gospel, or even to their hearing it? Though the subject of a discourse be weighty, and some just representation given of the evil of sin, the

worth of the soul, and the love of Christ; yet, if there be something amiss in the elocution, language, or manner of the preacher, people of taste must be possessed, in a good measure, of grace likewise, if they can hear him with tolerable patience. And perhaps three fourths of those who are accounted the most sensible and judicious in the auditory, will remember little about the sermon, but the tone of the voice, the awkwardness of the attitude, the obsolete expressions, and the like, while the poor and simple, not being encumbered with this hurtful accomplishment, receive the messenger as the Lord's servant, and the truth as the Lord's word, and are comforted and edified. But I stop. Some people would say, that I must suppose your lordship to have but little taste, or else much grace, or I should not venture to trouble you with such letters as mine.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXII.

My Lord,

THE apostle speaks of a *blessedness*, which it is the design of the Gospel to impart to those who receive it. The Galatians once had it, and spoke of it. The apostle reminds them of their loss, which is left upon record as a warning to us. His expression has led me sometimes to consider wherein a Christian's present blessedness consists. I mean that which is attainable in this state of trial, and the sense and exercise of which may be, and too often is, suspended and taken from us. It is a blessedness which, if we speak of man in a natural state, his eye hath not seen, nor his ear heard so as to understand it, nor can the idea of it

arise in his heart. It is no way dependent upon outward circumstances. Prosperity cannot impart it, preserve, or supply the want of it; nor can adversity put it out of our reach. The wise cannot acquire it by dint of superior abilities; nor shall the simple miss it for want of capacity.

The state of true believers, compared with that of others, is always *blessed.* If they are born from above, and united to Jesus, they are delivered from condemnation, and are heirs of eternal life, and may therefore well be accounted happy. But I consider now, not their harvest, but their first fruits; not their portion in reversion, but the *earnest* attainable in this life; not what they *shall be* in heaven, but what, in an humble attendance upon the Lord, they *may be* while upon earth. There is even at present a prize of our high calling set before us. It is much to be desired, that we had such a sense of its value as might prompt us so to run that we might obtain. I have thought this blessedness may be comprised in five particulars, though, in order to take a succinct view of the subject, some of these might be branched out into several others: but I would not by too many subdivisions give my letter the air of a sermon,

In the first place, a clear, well-grounded, habitual persuasion of our acceptance in the Beloved is attainable; and though we may be safe, we cannot be said to enjoy blessedness without it. To be in a state of suspense and uncertainty in a point of so great importance, is painful; and the Lord has accordingly provided, that his people may have strong consolation on this head. They are blessed, therefore, who have such views of the power, grace, and suitableness of Jesus, and the certainty and security of redemption in him, together with

such a consciousness that they have anchored their hopes, and ventured their all, upon his person, work, and promise, as furnishes them with a ready answer to all the cavils of unbelief and Satan, in the apostle's manner, Rom. viii. 31—37. That Paul could thus challenge and triumph over all charges and enemies, was not an appendage of his office as an apostle, but a part of his experience as a believer; and it lies equally open to us: for we have the same Gospel and the same promises as he had; nor is the efficacy of the Holy Spirit's teaching, a whit weakned by length of time. But many stop short of this. They have a hope, but it rather springs from their frames and feelings, than from a spiritual apprehension of the Redeemer's engagements and fulness, and therefore fluctuates and changes like the weather. Could they be persuaded to pray with earnestness and importunity, as the apostle prays for them, Ephes. i. 17, 18. and iii. 16—19. they would find a blessedness which they have not yet known; for it is said, "Ask, and ye shall receive."—And it is said likewise, "Ye receive not, because ye ask not."

Could this privilege be enjoyed singly, the natural man would have no objection to it. He would, (as he thinks,) be pleased to know he should be saved at last, provided that while here he might live in his sins. But the believer will not, cannot think himself blessed, unless he has likewise a conscience void of offence. This was the apostle's daily exercise, though no one was further from a legal spirit, or more dependent upon Jesus for acceptance. But if we live in any known sin, or allow ourselves in the customary omission of any known duty, supposing it possible, in such a case, to preserve a sense of our acceptance, (which can hardly be supposed, for if the Spirit be grieved, our evidences decline of

course,) yet we could not be easy. If a traveller was absolutely sure of reaching his journey's end in safety; yet if he walked with a thorn in his foot, he must take every step in pain. Such a thorn will be felt in the conscience, till we are favoured with a simplicity of heart, and made willing in all things, great or small, to yield obedience to the authority of the Lord's precepts, and make them the standing rule of our conduct, without wilfully admitting a single exception. At the best, we shall be conscious of innumerable short-comings, and shameful defilement; but these things will not break our peace if our hearts are upright. But if we trifle with light, and connive at what we know to be wrong, we shall be weak, restless, and uncomfortable. How many, who we would hope are the children of the King, are lean from day to day, because some right-hand or right-eye evil, which they cannot persuade themselves to part with, keeps them halting between two opinions; and they are as distant from happiness, as they are from the possibility of reconciling the incompatible services of God and the world. But happy indeed is he who condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

Real communion with the Lord, in his appointed means of grace, is likewise an important branch of this blessedness. They were instituted for this end, and are sufficient, by virtue of his power and Spirit, to answer it. I do not believe this enjoyment will be always equal. But I believe a comfortable sense of it, in some measure, is generally attainable. To read the Scripture, not as an attorney may read a will, merely to know the sense; but as the heir reads it, as a description and proof of his interest: to hear the Gospel, as the voice of our Beloved, so as to have little leisure either for admiring the abilities, or censuring the defects of the

preacher; and, in prayer, to feel a liberty of pouring out our hearts before the Lord, to behold some glances of his goodness passing before us, and to breathe forth before him the tempers of a child, the spirit of adoption: and thus, by beholding his glory, to be conformed more and more to his image, and to renew our strength, by drawing water out of the wells of salvation: herein is blessedness. They who have tasted it can say, it is good for me to draw nigh to God. The soul thus refreshed by the water of life, is preserved from thirsting after the vanities of the world; thus instructed in the sanctuary, comes down from the mount filled with heavenly wisdom, anointed with a holy unction, and thereby qualified to judge, speak and act in character, in all the relations and occasions of secular life. In this way, besides the pleasure, a spiritual taste is acquired, something analogous to the meaning of the word taste when applied to music or good-breeding, by which discords and improprieties are observed and avoided, as it were by instinct, and what is right is felt and followed, not so much by the force of rules, as by a habit insensibly acquired, and in which the substance of all necessary rules are, if I may so say, digested. O that I knew more of this blessedness, and more of its effects!

Another branch of blessedness, is a power of reposing ourselves and our concerns upon the Lord's faithfulness and care; and may be considered in two respects: a reliance upon him that he will surely provide for us, guide us, protect us, be our help in trouble, our shield in danger; so that however poor, weak, and defenceless in ourselves, we may rejoice in his all-sufficiency as our own;—and further, in consequence of this, a peaceful, humble submission to his will, under all events which, upon their first impression, are contrary

to our own views and desires. Surely, in a world like this, where every thing is uncertain, where we are exposed to trials on every hand, and know not but a single hour may bring forth something painful; yea, dreadful to our natural sensations, there can be no blessedness, but so far as we are thus enabled to intrust and resign all to the direction and faithfulness of the Lord our Shepherd. For want of more of this spirit, multitudes of professing Christians perplex and wound themselves, and dishonour their high calling, by continual anxieties, alarms, and complaints. They think nothing safe under the Lord's keeping, unless their own eye is likewise upon it; and are seldom satisfied with any of his dispensations: for though he gratify their desires in nine instances, a refusal in the tenth, spoils the relish of all, and they show the truths of the Gospel can afford them little comfort, if self is crossed. But blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: he shall be kept in perfect peace, though the earth be moved, and the mountains cast into the midst of the sea.

The paper admonishes me it is time to relieve your lordship:—and I have not room to detain you long upon the fifth particular. It belongs to a believer's blessedness, to feel his spirit cheerful and active for the Lord's service in the world. For to what other end should he wish to live? If he thought of himself only, it would be better to depart and be with Jesus immediately. But he is a debtor to his grace and love; and though, strictly, he can make no returns,—yet he longs to show his thankfulness: and if the Lord give him a heart to redeem his time, to devote his strength and influence, and lay himself out for his service,—that he may be instrumental in promoting his cause, in comforting his

people,—or enable him to let his light shine before men, that his God and Father may be honoured;—he will account it blessedness. This is indeed the great end of life, and he knows it will evidently appear so at the approach of death; and, therefore, while others are cumbered about many things, he esteems this the one thing needful.

I remain, my Lord, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

My Lord, July—1776.

THAT I may not weary you by a preamble, I oblige myself to take the turn of my letter from some passage of Scripture; and I fix upon that which just now occurred to my thoughts, a clause in that pattern of prayer which he who best knows our state, has been pleased to leave for the instruction of his people in their great concern of waiting at his throne of grace, Matth. vi. 13. —"And lead us not into temptation." This petition is seasonable at all times, and to all persons who have any right knowledge of themselves, or their spiritual calling.

The word *temptation*, taken at large, includes every kind of trial. To tempt is to try or prove. In this sense, it is said, the Lord tempted Abraham: that is, he tried him; for God cannot tempt to evil. He proposed such an act of obedience to him, as was a test of his faith, love, dependence, and integrity. Thus, all our afflictions, under his gracious management, are appointed to prove, manifest, exercise, and purify the graces of his children. And not afflictions only, prosperity likewise is a state of temptation: and many who

have endured sharp sufferings, and came off honourably, have been afterwards greatly hurt and ensnared by prosperity. To this purpose the histories of David and Hezekiah are in point. But by temptation we more frequently understand the wiles and force which Satan employs in assaulting our peace, or spreading snares for our feet. He is always practising against us, either directly and from himself, by the access he has to our hearts, or mediately, by the influence he has over the men and the things of this world. The words which follow confirm this sense,— " Lead us not into tempta-
" tion; but deliver us from evil," απο του πονηρου, from the *evil one*, as it might be properly rendered here, and in 1 John v. 19. The subtlety and power of this adversary are very great: he is an over-match for us; and we have no hope of safety but in the Lord's protection. Satan's action upon the heart may be illustrated by the action of the wind upon the sea. The sea sometimes appears smooth; but it is always disposed to swell and rage, and to obey the impulse of every storm. Thus, the heart may be sometimes quiet; but the wind of temptation will awaken and rouse it in a moment: for it is essential to our depraved nature to be unstable and yielding as the water; and when it is under the impression of the enemy, its violence can only be controlled by him, who says to the raging sea, " Be still, and here
" shall thy proud waves be stayed." The branches of temptation are almost innumerable; but the principal may be reduced to the several faculties of the soul, (as we commonly speak,) to which they are more directly suited.

He has temptations for the understanding. He can blind the mind with prejudices and false reasonings, and ply it with arguments for infidelity, till the most obvious

truths become questionable. Even where the Gospel has been received, he can insinuate error, which, for the suddenness and malignity of its effects, may be properly compared to poison. A healthy man may be poisoned in a moment; and if he be, the baneful drug is usually mixed with his food. Many who for a while seemed to be sound in the faith, have had their judgments strongly and strangely perverted, and prevailed upon to renounce and oppose the truths they once prized and defended. Such instances are striking proofs of human weakness, and loud calls to watchfulness and dependence, and to beware of leaning to our understandings. For these purposes he employs both preachers and authors, who, by fine words and fair speeches, beguile the hearts of the unwary. And, by his immediate influence upon the mind, he is able, (if the Lord permits him,) to entangle those who are providentially placed out of the reach of corrupt and designing men.

He tempts the conscience. By working upon the unbelief of our hearts, and darkening the glory of the Gospel, he can hold down the soul to the number, weight, and aggravation of its sins, so that it shall not be able to look up to Jesus, nor draw any comfort from his blood, promises, and grace. How many go burdened in this manner, seeking relief from duties, and perhaps spending their strength in things not commanded, though they hear, and perhaps acknowledge, the Gospel? Nor are the wisest and most established able to withstand his assaults, if the Lord withdraw and give him leave to employ his power and subtlety unrestrained. The Gospel affords sufficient ground for an abiding assurance of hope; nor should we rest satisfied without it. However, the possession and preservation of this privilege depends upon the Lord's pre-

sence with the soul, and his shielding us from Satan's attacks; for I am persuaded he is able to sift and shake the strongest believer upon earth.

He has likewise temptations suited to the will. Jesus makes his people willing in the day of his power; yet there is a contrary principle remaining within them, of which Satan knows how to avail himself. There are occasions in which he almost prevails to set self again upon the throne, as Dagon was raised after he had fallen before the ark. How else should any who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, give way to a repining spirit, account his dispensations hard, or his precepts too strict, so as to shrink from their observance through the fear of men, or a regard to their worldly interest?

Further, he has snares for the affections. In managing these, he gains a great advantage from our situation in a world that knows not God. The Scripture gives Satan the title of god of this world; and believers learn, by painful experience, how great his power is in and over the persons and things of it. So that to be steadfast in wisdom's ways, requires unremitted efforts, like pressing through a crowd, or swimming against a stream. How hard is it to live in the midst of pitch and not be defiled! The air of the world is infectious. Our business and unavoidable connexions are so interwoven with occasions of sin, and there is so much in our hearts suited to them, that unless we are incessantly upheld by almighty strength, we cannot stand a day or an hour. Past victories afford us no greater security than they did Samson, who was shamefully surprised by enemies whom he had formerly conquered. Nor are we only tempted by compliances that are evil in themselves. With respect to these, perhaps, conscience may be awake, and we stand upon our guard; but we are still upon Satan's

ground; and while he may seem to allow himself defeated, he can dexterously change his method, and come upon us where we do not suspect him. For *Perimus in licitis.* Perhaps our greatest danger arises from things in themselves lawful. He can tempt us by our nearest and dearest friend, and pervert every blessing of a kind Providence, into an occasion of drawing our hearts from the Giver; yea, spiritual blessings, gifts, comforts, and even graces, are sometimes the engines by which he practises against us, to fill us with vain confidence and self-sufficiency, or to lull us into formality and indolence.

That wonderful power which we call the imagination, is, I suppose, rather the medium of the soul's perceptions during its present state of union with the body, than a spiritual faculty, strictly speaking; but it partakes largely of that depravity which sin has brought upon our whole frame, and affords Satan an avenue for assaulting us with the most terrifying, if not the most dangerous of his temptations. At the best, we have but an indifferent command over it. We cannot, by an act of our own will, exclude a thousand painful, wild, inconsistent, and hurtful ideas, which are ever ready to obtrude themselves upon our minds; and a slight alteration in the animal system, in the motion of the blood or nervous spirits, is sufficient to withdraw it wholly from our dominion, and to leave us, like a city without walls or gates, exposed to the incursion of our enemy. We are fearfully and wonderfully made; and, with all our boasted knowledge of other things, can form no conception of what is so vastly interesting to us, the mysterious connexion between soul and body, and the manner in which they are mutually affected by each other. The effects we too sensibly feel. The wisest of men would be accounted fools or mad, were they to express in words a small part of what passes

within them; and it would appear that much of the soberest life is little better than a waking dream: but how dreadful are the consequences when the Lord permits some hidden pin in the human machine to be altered! Immediately a door flies open, which no hand but his can shut, and the enemy pours in like a flood, falsehood and horror, and the blackness of darkness; the judgment is borne down and disabled, and the most distressing illusions seize us with all the apparent force of evidence and demonstration. When this is the case in a certain degree, we call it distraction; but there are various degrees of it, which leave a person in the possession of his senses as to the things of common life, and yet are sufficient, with respect to his spiritual concerns, to shake the very foundations of his hope, and deprive him of all peace and comfort, and make him a terror to himself. All the Lord's people are not called to navigate in these deep waters of soul distress; but all are liable. Ah! if we knew what some suffer, the *Horribilia de Deo, et Terribilia de Fide*, which excruciate the minds of those over whom Satan is permitted to tyrannise in this way, surely we should be more earnest and frequent in praying, "Lead us not into temptation." From some little sense I have of the malice and subtlety of our spiritual enemies, and the weakness of those barriers which we have to prevent their assaults, I am fully persuaded that nothing less than the continual exertion of that almighty power which preserves the stars in their orbits, can maintain our peace of mind for an hour or a minute. In this view, all comparative difference in external situations seems to be annihilated; for as the Lord's presence can make his people happy in a dungeon, so there are temptations, which, if we felt them, would instantly render us incapable of receiving a moment's satisfaction

from an assemblage of all earthly blessings, and make the company of our dearest friends tasteless, if not insupportable.

Ah! how little do the gay and the busy think of these things! How little indeed do they think of them who profess to believe them! How faint is the sense of our obligations to *him*, who freely submitted to the fiercest onsets of the powers of darkness, to free us from the punishment due to our sins; otherwise we must have been for ever shut up with those miserable and merciless spirits, who delight in our torment, and who, even in the present state, if they get access to our minds, can make our existence a burden!

But our Lord, who knows and considers our weakness, of which we are so little aware, allows and directs us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." We are not to expect an absolute freedom from temptation; we are called to be soldiers, and must sometimes meet with enemies, and perhaps with wounds; yet considering this prayer as provided by him, who knows what we are, and where we are, it may afford us both instruction and consolation.

It calls to a constant reflection upon our own weakness. Believers, especially young ones, are prone to rest too much in grace received. They feel their hearts warm; and, like Peter, are ready to please themselves with thinking how they would act in such or such a state of trial. It is as if the Lord had said, Poor worms, be not high-minded, but fear and pray, that, if it may be, you may be kept from learning, by bitter experience, how weak your supposed strength is. It sweetly intimates, that all our ways, and all our enemies, are in the hands of our great Shepherd. He knows our path. We are short-sighted, and cannot tell what an hour may

bring forth: but we are under his protection; and if we depend upon him, we need not be anxiously afraid. He will be faithful to the trust we repose in him, and will suffer no temptation to overtake us, but what he will support us under and bring us through. But it becomes us to beware of security and presumption, to keep our eyes upon him, and not to think ourselves safe a moment longer than our spirits feel and breathe the meaning of this petition.

It implies, likewise, the duty of watchfulness on our part, as our Lord joins them elsewhere, "Watch and "pray." If we desire not to be led into temptation, surely we are not to run into it. If we wish to be preserved from error, we are to guard against a curious and reasoning spirit. If we would preserve peace of conscience, we must beware of trifling with the light and motions of the Holy Spirit; for without his assistance we cannot maintain faith in exercise. If we would not be ensnared by the men of the world, we are to keep at a proper distance from them. The less we have to do with them the better, excepting so far as the providence of God makes it our duty in the discharge of our callings and relations, and taking opportunities of doing them good. And though we cannot wholly shut Satan out of our imaginations, we should be cautious that we do not wilfully provide fuel for his flame; but entreat the Lord to set a watch upon our eyes and our ears, and to teach us to reject the first motions and the smallest appearance of evil.

I have been so intent upon my subject, that I have once and again forgot I was writing to your lordship, otherwise I should not have let my lucubration run to so great a length, which I certainly did not intend when I began. I shall not add to this fault, by making an

apology. I have touched upon a topic of great importance to myself. I am one among many who have suffered greatly for want of paying more attention to my need of this prayer. O that I could be wiser hereafter, and always act and speak as knowing that I am always upon a field of battle, and beset by legions!

I am, with great respect, &c.

LETTER XXIV.

My Lord, September—1776.

WITHOUT any preamble, I purpose now to wait on your lordship, with a few thoughts on the meaning of that name which first obtained at Antioch, in other words, what it is to be a Christian? What are the effects, which, (making allowance for the unavoidable infirmities attending upon the present state of mortality,) may be expected from a real experimental knowledge of the Gospel? I would not insinuate that none are Christians who do not come up to the character I would describe; for then I fear I should unchristian myself: but only to consider what the Scripture encourages us to aim at as the prize of our high calling in this life. It is generally allowed and lamented, that we are too apt to live below our privileges, and to stop short of what the spirit and the promises of the Gospel point out to us as attainable.

Mr. Pope's admired line, "An honest man's the "noblest work of God," may be admitted as a truth when rightly explained. A Christian is the noblest work of God in this visible world, and bears a much brighter impression of his glory and goodness than the sun in the firmament; and none but a Christian can be strictly and properly honest: all others are too much

under the power of self, to do universally to others as they would others should do unto them; and nothing but an uniform conduct upon this principle deserves the name of honesty.

The Christian is a new creature, born and taught from above. He has been convinced of his guilt and misery as a sinner; has fled for refuge to the hope set before him; has seen the Son and believed on him: his natural prejudices against the glory and grace of God's salvation have been subdued and silenced by almighty power; he has accepted the Beloved, and is made acceptable in him: he now knows the Lord; has renounced the confused, distant, uncomfortable notions he once formed of God; and beholds him in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, the only door by which we can enter to any true satisfying knowledge of God, or communion with him. But he sees God in Christ, reconciled, a Father, a Saviour, and a Friend, who has freely forgiven him all his sins, and given him the spirit of adoption: he is now no longer a servant, much less a stranger, but a son; and because a son, an heir already interested in all the promises, admitted to the throne of grace, and an assured expectant of eternal glory. The Gospel is designed to give us not only a peradventure or a probability, but a certainty both of our acceptance and our perseverance, till death shall be swallowed up in life. And though many are sadly fluctuating and perplexed upon this head, and perhaps all are so for a season; yet there are those who can say, we know that we are of God; and therefore they are steadfast and unmoveable in his way; because they are confident that their labour shall not be in vain, but that when they shall be absent from the body, they shall be present with their Lord. This is the state of the advanced, experienced

Christian, who, being enabled to make his profession the chief business of his life, is strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Every one who has this hope in Christ, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.—I would now attempt a sketch of the Christian's temper, formed upon these principles and hopes, under the leading branches of its exercise, respecting God, himself, and his fellow-creatures.

The Christian's temper God-ward is evidenced by *humility*. He has received from Gethsemane and Golgotha such a sense of the evil of sin, and of the holiness of God, combined with his matchless love to sinners, as has deeply penetrated his heart; he has an affecting remembrance of the state of rebellion and enmity in which he once lived against this holy and good God; and he has a quick perception of the defilements and defects which still debase his best services. His mouth is therefore stopped as to boasting; he is vile in his own eyes, and is filled with wonder, that the Lord should visit such a sinner with such a salvation. He sees so vast a disproportion between the obligations he is under to grace, and the returns he makes, that he is disposed, yea, constrained, to adopt the apostle's words without affectation, and to account himself less than the least of all saints; and knowing his own *heart*, while he sees only the outside of others, he is not easily persuaded there can be a believer upon earth so faint, so unfruitful, so unworthy as himself. Yet, though abased, he is not discouraged, for he enjoys *peace*. The dignity, offices, blood, righteousness, faithfulness, and compassion of the Redeemer, in whom he rests, trusts, and lives, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, are adequate to all his wants and wishes, provide him with an answer to every

objection, and give him no less confidence in God, than if he were sinless as an angel: for he sees, that though sin has abounded in him, grace has much more abounded in Jesus. With respect to the past, all things are become new; with respect to the present and future, he leans upon an almighty arm, and relies upon the word and power which made and upholds the heavens and the earth. Though he feels himself unworthy of the smallest mercies, he claims and expects the greatest blessings that God can bestow; and being rooted and grounded in the knowledge and love of Christ, his peace abides, and is not greatly affected, either by the variation of his own frames, or the changes of God's dispensations towards him while here. With such a sense of himself, such a heart felt peace and heavenly hope, how can his spirit but breathe *love* to his God and Saviour? It is indeed the perfection of his character and happiness, that his soul is united by love to the chief good. The love of Christ is the joy of his heart, and the spring of his obedience. With his Saviour's presence, he finds a heaven begun upon earth; and without it, all the other glories of the heavenly state would not content him. The excellence of Christ, his love to sinners, especially his dying love; his love to himself in seeking and saving him when lost, saving him to the uttermost—But I must stop. Your lordship can better conceive than I can describe, how and why Jesus is dear to the heart that knows him. That part of the Christian's life which is not employed in the active service of his Lord, is chiefly spent in seeking and maintaining communion with him. For this he plies the throne, and studies the word of grace, and frequents the ordinances, where the Lord has promised to meet with his people. These are his golden

hours; and when thus employed, how poor and trivial does all that the world calls great and important appear in his eyes! Yea, he is solicitous to keep up an intercourse of heart with his Beloved in his busiest scenes; and so far as he can succeed, it alleviates all his labours, and sweetens all his troubles. And when he is neither communing with his Lord, nor acting for him, he accounts his time lost, and is ashamed and grieved. The truth of his love is manifested by *submission*. This is twofold, and absolute, and without reserve in each. He submits to his revealed will, as made known to him by precept, and by his own example. He aims to tread in his Saviour's footsteps, and makes conscience of *all* his commandments, without exception, and without hesitation. Again, he submits to his providential will: he yields to his sovereignty, acquiesces in his wisdom; he knows he has no *right* to complain of any thing, because he is a sinner; and he has no *reason*, because he is sure the Lord does all things well. Therefore, this submission is not forced, but is an act of *trust*. He knows he is not more unworthy than he is unable to choose for himself, and therefore rejoices that the Lord has undertaken to manage for him; and were he compelled to make his own choice, he could only choose, that all his concerns should remain in that hand to which he has already committed them. And thus he judges of *public*, as well as of his personal affairs. He cannot be an unaffected spectator of national sins, nor without apprehension of their deserved consequences; he feels, and almost trembles for others, but he himself dwells under the shadow of the Almighty, in a sanctuary that cannot be forced; and, therefore, should he see the earth shaken, and the mountains cast into the midst of the sea, his heart

would not be greatly moved, for God is his refuge.—The Lord reigns. He sees his Saviour's hand directing every dark appearance, and over-ruling all to the accomplishment of his own great purposes: this satisfies him; and though the winds and waves should be high, he can venture his own little bark in the storm, for he has an infallible and almighty Pilot on board with him. And indeed, why should he fear when he has nothing to lose? His best concerns are safe; and other things he holds as gifts from his Lord, to whose call he is ready to resign them, in whatever way he pleases; well knowing, that creatures and instruments cannot of themselves touch a hair of his head without the Lord's permission, and that if he does permit them, it must be for the best.

I might enlarge further.—But I shall proceed to consider the Christian's temper respecting himself. He lives godly and *soberly*. By sobriety we mean more than that he is not a drunkard; his tempers toward God, of course, form him to a moderation in all temporal things. He is not scrupulous or superstitious; he understands the liberty of the Gospel, that every creature of God is good if it be received with thanksgiving: he does not aim at being needlessly singular, nor practise self-devised austerities. The Christian is neither a Stoic nor a Cynic; yet he finds daily cause for watchfulness and restraint. Satan will not often tempt a believer to gross crimes: our greatest snares and sorest conflicts are usually found in things lawful in themselves, but hurtful to us by their abuse, engrossing too much of our time, or of our hearts, or somehow indisposing us for communion with the Lord. The Christian will be jealous of any thing that might entangle his affections, damp his zeal, or straighten him in

his opportunities of serving his Saviour. He is likewise content with his situation, because the Lord chooses it for him; his spirit is not eager for additions and alterations in his circumstances. If Divine Providence points out and leads to a change, he is ready to follow, though it should be what the world would call from a better to a worse; for he is a pilgrim and a stranger here, and a citizen of heaven. As people of fortune sometimes, in travelling, submit cheerfully to inconvenient accommodations, very different from their homes, and comfort themselves with thinking they are not always to live so; so the Christian is not greatly solicitous about externals. If he has them, he will use them moderately. If he has but little of them, he can make a good shift without them: he is but upon a journey, and will soon be at home. If he be rich, experience confirms our Lord's words, Luke xii. 15.; and satisfies him, that a large room, a crowd of servants, and twenty dishes upon his table, add nothing to the real happiness of life. Therefore he will not have his heart set upon such things. If he be in a humbler state, he is more disposed to pity than to envy those above him; for he judges they must have many encumbrances from which he is freed. However, the will of God, and the light of his countenance, are the chief things the Christian, whether rich or poor, regards; and therefore his moderation is made known unto all men.

A third branch of the Christian's temper respects his fellow-creatures. And here, methinks, if I had not filled a sheet already, I could enlarge with pleasure. We have, in this degenerate day, among those who claim, and are allowed the name of Christian, too many of a narrow, selfish, mercenary spirit; but in the be-

ginning it was not so. The Gospel is designed to cure such a spirit, but gives no indulgence to it. A Christian has the mind of Christ, who went about doing good, who makes his sun to shine upon the good and the evil, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. His Lord's example forms him to the habit of diffusive benevolence; he breathes a spirit of good-will to mankind, and rejoices in every opportunity of being useful to the souls and bodies of others, without respect to parties or interests. He commiserates, and would, if possible, alleviate, the miseries of all around him; and if his actual services are restrained by want of ability, yet all share in his sympathy and prayers. Acting in the spirit of his Master, he frequently meets with a measure of the like treatment; but if his good is requited with evil, he labours to overcome evil with good. He feels himself a sinner, and needs much forgiveness: this makes him ready to forgive. He is not haughty, captious, easily offended, or hard to be reconciled; for at the feet of Jesus he has learned meekness; and when he meets with unkindness or injustice, he considers, that, though he has not deserved such things from men, they are instruments employed by his heavenly Father, (from whom he has deserved to suffer much more,) for his humiliation and chastisement; and is therefore more concerned for their sins than for his own sufferings, and prays, after the pattern of his Saviour, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what "they do!" He knows he is fallible; therefore cannot be positive. He knows he is frail; and therefore dares not be censorious. As a member of society, he is just, punctual in the discharge of every relative duty, faithful to his engagements and promises, rendering to all their dues, obedient to lawful authority, and acting to

all men according to the golden rule, of doing as he would be done by. His conduct is simple, devoid of artifice, and consistent, attending to every branch of duty; and in the closet, the family, the church, and in the transactions of common life, he is the same man; for in every circumstance he serves the Lord, and aims to maintain a conscience void of offence in his sight. No small part of the beauty of his profession in the sight of men, consists in the due government of his tongue. The law of truth, and kindness, and purity, is upon his lips. He abhors lying; and is so far from inventing a slander, that he will not repeat a report to the disadvantage of his neighbour, however true, without a proper call. His converse is cheerful, but inoffensive; and he will no more wound another with his wit, (if he has a talent that way,) than with a knife. His speech is with grace, seasoned with salt, and suited to promote the peace and edification of all around him.

Such is the Christian in civil life; but though he loves all mankind, he stands in a nearer relation, and bears an especial brotherly love, to all who are partakers of the faith and hope of the Gospel. This regard is not confined within the pale of a denomination, but extended to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. He calls no man master himself; nor does he wish to impose a Shibboleth of his own upon others. He rejoices in the image of God, wherever he sees it, and in the work of God, wherever it is carried on. Though tenacious of the truths which the Lord has taught him, his heart is open to those who differ from him in less essential points, and allows to others that right of private judgment which he claims for himself, and is disposed to hold communion in love with all who hold the head. He cannot indeed countenance those

who set aside the one foundation which God has laid in Zion, and maintain errors derogatory to the honour of his Saviour, or subversive of the faith and experience of his people; yet he wishes well to their persons, pities and prays for them, and is ready in meekness to instruct them that oppose: but there is no bitterness in his zeal, being sensible that raillery and invective are dishonourable to the cause of truth, and quite unsuitable in the mouth of a sinner, who owes all that distinguishes him from the vilest of men to the free grace of God. In a word, he is influenced by the wisdom from above, which, as it is pure, is likewise peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

I must just recur to my first head, and observe, that with this spirit and deportment, the Christian, while he is enabled to maintain a conscience void of offence towards God and man, is still sensible and mindful of indwelling sin: he has his eye more upon his rule than upon his attainments; and therefore finds and confesses, that in every thing he comes exceedingly short, and that his best services are not only defective but defiled: he accounts himself an unprofitable servant, is abased in his own eyes, and derives all his hope and comfort, as well as his strength, from Jesus, whom he has known, received, and trusted; to whom he has committed his soul; in whom he rejoices, and worships God in the spirit, renouncing all confidence in the flesh, and esteeming all things as loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

If I have lately been rather tardy in making my payments to your lordship, I have proportionably increased the quantity. It is high time I should now relieve your

patience. I hope I long to be a Christian indeed; and I hope this hasty exemplification of my wishes will answer to your lordship's experience better than I fear it does to my own. May I beg a remembrance in your prayers, that he who has given me to will and desire, may work in me to be and to do according to his own good pleasure.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXV.

My Lord, November—1776.

MY London journey, which prevented my writing in October, made me amends by an opportunity of waiting upon your lordship in person. Such seasons are not only pleasant at the time, but afford me pleasure in the review. I could have wished the half hour we were together by ourselves prolonged to half a day. The subject your lordship was pleased to suggest has been often upon my mind; and glad should I be, were I able to offer you any thing satisfactory upon it.—There is no doubt but first religious impressions are usually mingled with much of a legal spirit; and that conscience at such a time is not only tender, but misinformed and scrupulous: and I believe, as your lordship intimated, that when the mind is more enlightened, and we feel a liberty from many fetters we had imposed upon ourselves, we are in danger of verging too far towards the other extreme. It seems to me that no one person can adjust the medium, and draw the line exactly for another. There are so many particulars in every situation, of which a stranger cannot be a competent judge, and the best human advices and mo-

dels are mixed with such defects, that it is not *right* to expect others to be absolutely guided by our rules, nor is it *safe* for us implicitly to adopt the decisions or practices of others. But the Scripture undoubtedly furnishes sufficient and infallible rules for every person, however circumstanced; and the throne of grace is appointed for us to wait upon the Lord for the best exposition of his precepts. Thus David often prays to be led in the right way, in the path of judgment. By frequent prayer, and close acquaintance with the Scripture, and an habitual attention to the frame of our hearts, there is a certain delicacy of spiritual taste and discernment to be acquired, which renders a nice disquisition concerning the nature and limits of the Adiaphora, as they are called, or how near we may go to the utmost bounds of what is right, without being wrong, quite unnecessary. Love is the clearest and most persuasive casuist; and when our love to the Lord is in lively exercise, and the rule of his word is in our eye, we seldom make great mistakes. And I believe the overdoings of a young convert, proceeding from an honest simplicity of heart, and a desire of pleasing the Lord, are more acceptable in his sight than a certain coolness of conduct, which frequently takes place afterward, when we are apt to look back with pity upon our former weakness, and secretly to applaud ourselves for our present greater attainments in knowledge, though perhaps, (alas, that it should ever be so!) we may have lost as much in warmth as we have gained in light.

From the time we know the Lord, and are bound to him by the cords of love and gratitude, the two chief points we should have in our view, I apprehend, are to maintain communion with him in our own souls, and to glorify him in the sight of men. Agreeable to these

views, though the Scripture does not enumerate or decide *totidem verbis*, for or against many things which some plead for, and others condemn; yet it furnishes us with some general canons, which if rightly applied, will perhaps go a good way towards settling the debate, at least to the satisfaction of those who would rather please God than man. Some of these canons I will just mark to your lordship: Rom. xii. 1, 2. 1 Cor. viii. 13. and x. 31. 2 Cor. vi. 17. Ephes. iv. 30. Ephes. v. 11. 15, 16. 1 Thes. v. 22. Ephes. vi. 18. to which I may add, as suitable to the present times, Isa. xxii. 12. Luke xxi. 34. I apprehend the spirit of these and similar passages of Scripture, (for it would be easy to adduce a larger number,) will bring a Christian under such restrictions as follow.

To avoid and forbear, for his own sake, whatever has a tendency to damp and indispose his spirit in attendance upon the means of grace; for such things, if they be not condemned as sinful *per se*, if they be not absolutely unlawful, yea, though they be, when duly regulated, lawful and right, (for often our chief snares are entwined with our blessings;) yet if they have a repeated and evident tendency to deaden our hearts to divine things, of which each person's experience must determine, there must be something in them, either in season, measure, or circumstance, wrong to us; and let them promise what they will, they do but rob us of our gold to pay us with counters. For the light of God's countenance, and an open cheerfulness of spirit in walking with him in private, is our chief joy; and we must be already greatly hurt, if any thing can be pursued, allowed, or rested in, as a tolerable substitute for it.

For the sake of the church, and the influence example

may have upon his fellow Christians, the law of charity and prudence will often require a believer to abstain from some things, not because they are unlawful, but inexpedient. Thus the apostle, though strenuous for the *right* of his Christian liberty, would have abridged himself of the *use*, so as to eat no meat, rather than offend a weak brother, rather than mislead him to act against the present light of his conscience. Upon this principle, if I could, without hurt to myself, attend some public amusements, as a concert or oratorio, and return from thence with a warm heart to my closet, (the possibility of which, in my own case, I greatly question;) yet I should think it my duty to forbear, lest some weaker than myself should be encouraged by me to make the like experiment, though in their own minds they might fear it was wrong, and have no other reason to think it lawful but because I did it: in which case I should suspect, that though I received no harm, they would. And I have known and conversed with some who I fear have made shipwreck of their profession, who have dated their first decline from imitating others, whom they thought wiser and better than themselves, in such kind of compliances. And it seems that an obligation of this sort of self-denial rises and is strengthened in proportion to the weight and influence of our characters. Were I in private life, I do not know that I should think it sinful to kill a partridge or a hare; but, as a minister, I no more dare do it than I dare join in a drunken frolic, because I know it would give offence to some, and be pleaded for as a license by others.

There is a duty, and a charity likewise, which we owe to the world at large, as well as a faithfulness to God and his grace, in our necessary converse among

them. This seems to require, that though we should not be needlessly singular, yet, for their instruction, and for the honour of our Lord and Master, we should keep up a certain kind of singularity, and show ourselves called to be a separated people: that though the providence of God has given us callings and relations to fill up, (in which we cannot be too exact,) yet we are not of the world, but belong to another community, and act from other principles, by other rules, and to other ends, than the generality of those about us. I have observed that the world will often leave professors in quiet possession of their notions and sentiments, and places of worship, provided they will not be too stiff in the matter of conformity with their more general customs and amusements. But I fear many of them have had their prejudices strengthened against our holy religion by such compliances, and have thought that if there were such joy and comfort to be found in the ways of God as they hear from our pulpits, professors would not, in such numbers, and so often, run amongst them to beg a relief from the burden of time hanging upon their hands. As our Lord Jesus is the great representative of his people in heaven, he does them the honour to continue a succession of them as his representatives upon earth. Happy are they who are favoured with most of the holy unction, and best enabled to manifest to all around them, by their spirit, tempers, and conversation, what is the proper design and genuine effect of his Gospel upon the hearts of sinners.

In our way of little life in the country, serious people often complain of the snares they meet with from worldly people, and yet they must mix with them to get a livelihood. I advise them, if they can, to do their business with the world as they do it in the rain. If

their business calls them abroad, they will not leave it undone for fear of being a little wet; but then, when it is done, they presently seek shelter, and will not stand in the rain for pleasure; so providential and necessary calls of duty, that lead us into the world, will not hurt us, if we find the spirit of the world unpleasant, and are glad to retire from it, and keep out of it as much as our relative duties will permit. That which is our cross, is not so likely to be our snare; but if that spirit, which we should always watch and pray against, infects and assimilates our minds to itself, then we are sure to suffer loss, and act below the dignity of our profession.

The value of time is likewise to be taken into the account. It is a precious talent, and our Christian profession opens a wide field for the due improvement of it. Much of it has been already lost, and therefore we are exhorted to redeem it. I think many things which custom pleads for will be excluded from a suitableness to a Christian, for this one reason, that they are not consistent with the simplest notion of the redemption of time. It is generally said we need relaxation; I allow it in a sense: the Lord himself has provided it; and because our spirits are too weak to be always upon the wing in meditation and prayer, he has appointed to all men, from the king downwards, something to do in a secular way. The poor are to labour, the rich are not exempted from something equivalent. And when every thing of this sort in each person's situation is properly attended to, I apprehend, if the heart be alive, and in a right state, spiritual concernments will present themselves, as affording the noblest, sweetest, and most interesting relaxation from the cares and business of life; as, on the other hand, that business will be the

best relaxation and unbending of the mind from religious exercises; and, between the two, perhaps there ought to be but little mere leisure time. A life *in this sense,* divided between God and the world, is desirable, when one part of it is spent in retirement, seeking after and conversing with him whom our souls love; and the other part of it employed in active services for the good of our family, friends, the church, and society, for his sake. Every hour which does not fall in with one or other of these views, I apprehend is lost time.

The day in which we live seems likewise to call for something of a peculiar spirit in the Lord's people. It is a day of abounding sin, and I fear a day of impending judgment. The world, as it was in the days of Noah and Lot, is secure. We are soon to have a day of apparent humiliation; but the just causes for it are not confined to one day, but will subsist, and too probably increase every day. If I am not mistaken in the signs of the times, there never was, within the annals of the English history, a period in which the spirit and employment described, Ezek. ix. 4. could be more suitable than the present. The Lord calls for mourning and weeping, but the words of many are stout against him; new species of dissipation are invented almost daily, and the language of those who bear the greatest sway in what is called the polite circle, I mean the interpretative language of their hearts, is like that of the rebellious Jews, Jer. xliv. 16, 17, &c. "As for "the word which thou hast spoken, we will not hearken "unto thee at all." In short, things are coming to a point, and it seems to be almost putting to the vote whether the Lord or Baal be God. In this state of affairs, methinks, we cannot be too explicit in avowing our attachment to the Lord, nor too careful in avoiding

an improper correspondence with those who are in confederacy against him. We know not how soon we may greatly need that mark of providential protection which is restrained to those who sigh and cry for our abominations. Upon the whole, it appears to me, that it is more honourable, comfortable, and safe, (if we cannot exactly hit the golden mean,) to be thought by some too scrupulous and precise, than actually to be found too compliant with those things which, if not absolutely contrary to a divine commandment, are hardly compatible with the genius of the Gospel, or conformable to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, which ought also to be in his people. The places and amusements which the world frequent and admire, where occasions and temptations to sin are cultivated, where the law of what is called good breeding is the only law which may not be violated with impunity, where sinful passions are provoked and indulged, where the fear of God is so little known or regarded, that those who do fear him must hold their tongues though they should hear his name blasphemed, can hardly be a Christian's voluntary chosen ground. Yet I fear these characters will apply to every kind of polite amusement or assembly in the kingdom.

As to family connexions, I cannot think we are bound to break or slight them. But as believers and their friends often live as it were in two elements, there is a mutual awkwardness, which makes their interviews rather dry and tedious. But upon that account they are less frequent than they would otherwise be, which seems an advantage. Both sides keep up returns of civility and affection; but as they cannot unite in sentiment and leading inclination, they will not contrive to be very often together, except there is some-

thing considerable given up by one or the other; and I think Christians ought to be very cautious what concessions they make upon this account. But, as I said at the beginning, no general positive rules can be laid down.

I have simply given your lordship such thoughts as have occurred to me while writing, without study, and without coherence. I dare not be dogmatical; but I think what I have written is agreeable both to particular texts and to the general tenor of Scripture. I submit it to your judgment.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXVI.

My Lord, July—1777.

I OWE your lordship a quire of letters, for the favour and pleasure of your late visit; and therefore I must begin and write away.

I have lately read Robertson's History of Charles V. which, like most other histories, I consider as a comment upon those passages of Scripture which teach us the depravity of man, the deceitfulness of the heart, the ruinous effects of sin, and the powerful, though secret, rule of Divine Providence, moving, directing, controlling the designs and actions of men, with an unerring hand, to the accomplishment of his own purposes, both of mercy and judgment. Without the clue and the light which the word of God affords, the history of mankind, of any, of every age, only presents to view a labyrinth and a chaos; a detail of wickedness and misery to make us tremble, and a confused jumble of interfering incidents, as destitute of stability, connex-

ion, or order, as the clouds which fly over our heads. In this view, *Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi,* may serve as a motto to all the histories I have seen. But with the Scripture key, all is plain, all is instructive. Then I see, verily there is a God, who governs the earth, who pours contempt upon princes, takes the wise in their own craftiness, over-rules the wrath and pride of man, to bring his own designs to pass, and restrains all that is not necessary to that end; blasting the best concerted enterprises at one time, by means apparently slight, and altogether unexpected, and at other times producing the most important events, from instruments and circumstances which are at first thought too feeble and trivial to deserve notice. I should like to see a writer of Dr. Robertson's abilities give us a history upon this plan; but I think his reflections of this sort are too general, too cold, and too few. What an empty phantom do the great men of the world pursue, while they wage war with the peace of mankind, and butcher, (in the course of their lives,) perhaps hundreds of thousands, to maintain the shadow of authority over distant nations, whom they can reach with no other influence than that of oppression and devastation! But when we consider those who are sacrificed to their ambition, as justly suffering for their sins, then heroes and conquerors appear in their proper light, and worthy to be classed with earthquakes and pestilences, as instruments of divine vengeance. So many cares, so much pains, so many mischiefs, merely to support the idea a worm has formed of his own grandeur, is a proof that man, by nature, is not only depraved, but infatuated. Permit me to present my thoughts to more advantage, in the words of M. Nicole:—

" Un grand dans son idée n'est pas un seul homme ; " c'est un homme environné de tous ceux qui sont à " lui, et qui s'imagine avoir autant de bras qu'ils en ont " tous ensemble, parce qu'il en dispose et qu'il les re- " mue. Un general d'armée se represente toujours à " lui-même, au milieu de tous ses soldats. Ainsi " chacun tâche d'occuper le plus de place qu'il peut " dans son imagination, et l'on ne se pousse, et ne " s'agrandit dans le monde, que pour augmentir l'idée " que chacun se forme de soi-même. Voilà le but de " tous les desseins ambitieux des hommes ! Alexandre " et Cæsar n'ont point eu d'autre vûe dans toutes leurs " batailles que celle-là. Et si l'on demande pourquoi " le grand seigneur a fait depuis peu perir cent mille " hommes devant Candie, on peut repondre surement, " que ce n'est que pour attacher encore à cette image " interieure qu'il a de lui-même, le titre de conque- " rant*."

How awful is the case of those who live and die in such a spirit, and who have multiplied miseries upon their fellow-creatures, in order to support and feed it! Perhaps they may, upon their entrance on another state, be accosted by multitudes, to the purport of that sarcastical language in the prophet's sublime ode of triumph over the king of Babylon, Isa. xiv. 5—17.

Hic est, quem fuga, quem pavor
Præcessit ? hic, quem terricolis gravem
Strages secuta est, vastitasque ? hic
Attoniti spoliator orbis ?

But though the effects of this principle of self are more extensive and calamitous, in proportion as those

* Essais De Morale, Vol. I.

who are governed by it are more elevated, the principle itself is deep-rooted in every heart, and is the spring of every action, till grace infuses a new principle, and self, like Dagon, falls before the Lord of hosts. Great and small are but relative terms; and the passions of discontent, pride, and envy, which, in the breast of a potentate, are severely felt by one half of Europe, exert themselves with equal strength in the heart of a peasant, though, for want of materials and opportunities, their operations are confined within narrow bounds. We are fallen into a state of gross idolatry, and self is the idol we worship.

I am, &c.

MISCELLANEOUS

CORRESPONDENCE.

EIGHT LETTERS

TO THE

REV. MR. S****.

LETTER I.

Dear Sir, June 23, 1775.

I HAVE met with interruptions till now, or you would have heard from me sooner. My thoughts have run much upon the subject of your last, because I perceive it has a near connexion with your peace. Your integrity greatly pleases me; far be it from me to shake the *principle* of your conduct; yet, in the application, I think there is a possibility of carrying your exceptions too far.

From the account you give me of your sentiments, I cannot but wonder you find it so difficult to accede to the Athanasian Creed, when it seems to me you believe and avow what that creed chiefly sets forth. *The doctrine of the Trinity*, some explication of the terms being subjoined, is the Catholic Faith: without the belief of which a man cannot be saved. This damnatory clause seems to me proved by Mark xvi. 16. "He that be-"lieveth shall be saved," &c. The object of faith must be *truth*. The doctrine of the Deity of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, in union with the Father, so that they are not three Gods, but one God, is not merely a proposition expressed in words, to which our assent is required, but is absolutely necessary to be known; since without it no one truth respecting salvation can be rightly understood, no one promise duly believed, no one duty spiritually performed. I take it for granted, that this doctrine must appear irrational and absurd in the eye of reason, if by reason we mean the reason of

man in his fallen state, before it is corrected and enlightened by a heavenly teacher. No man can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. I believe with you, that a man may be saved who never heard of the creed, who never read any book but the New Testament, or perhaps a single evangelist; but he must be taught of God the things that accompany salvation, or I do not think he can be saved. *The mercies of God in Christ* will not save any, (as I apprehend,) but according to the method revealed in his word, that is, those who are truly partakers of faith and holiness. For as the religion of the New Testament ascribes all power to God, and considers all goodness in us as the effect of his communication, we being by nature destitute of spiritual life or light; so those whom God himself is pleased to teach, will infallibly attain the knowledge of all that they are concerned to know. This teaching you are waiting for, and it shall be given you; yea, the Lord, I trust, has begun to teach you already: but if you consider yourself as a learner, and that it is possible, under the Spirit's increasing illumination, you may hereafter adopt some things which at present you cannot approve, I should think it too early as yet to prescribe to yourself rules and determinations for the government of your future life. Should the will of God appoint you a new path for service, he may, sooner than you are aware, quiet your mind, and enable you to subscribe with as full a persuasion of mind, as you now object to subscription. If it depended upon me, I could be content that the creed should rest at the bottom of the sea, rather than embarrass a single person of *your* disposition. Nor am I a warm stickler for subscription in itself; but something of this kind seems necessary upon the supposition of an establishment.

When I think of an inclosure, some hedge, wall, bank, ditch, &c. is of course included in my idea; for who can conceive of an inclosure without a boundary? So, in a national church, there must be, I apprehend, something marked out, the approbation or refusal of which will determine who do or do not belong to it: and for this purpose articles of some kind seem not improper. You think it would be better to have these articles in Scriptural expressions. But if it be lawful to endeavour to exclude from our pulpits men who hold sentiments the most repugnant to the truth, I wish you to consider, whether this can be in any measure secured by articles in which the Scripture-doctrines are not explained and stated, as well as expressed. This proposal is strenuously pleaded for by many in our day, upon views very different from yours. The Socinians, for instance, would readily subscribe a Scriptural declaration of the high priesthood, atonement, and intercession of Christ, (while they are allowed to put their own sense upon the terms;) though the sense they maintain be utterly inconsistent with what those who are enlightened by the Holy Spirit learn from the same expressions.

I acknowledge, indeed, that the end is not answered by the present method; since there are too many, like the person you mention, who would easily subscribe nine hundred articles, rather than balk his preferment: yet the profligacy of some seems to be no just reason why the church, why any church, should not be at liberty to define the terms upon which they will accept members or teachers, or why conscientious persons should object to these terms, (if they think them agreeable to the truth,) merely because they are not expressed in the precise words of Scripture. If allowance may be

made for human infirmity in the *Liturgy*, I see not why the *Articles* may not be entitled to the same privilege. For it seems requisite that we should be as well satisfied with the expressions we use with our lips, in frequent solemn prayer to God, as in what we subscribe with our hands. I am persuaded that the leaders of the Association at the Feathers Tavern, some of them at least, though they begin with the affair of subscription, would not, (if they might have their wish,) stop there, but would go on with their projected reform, till they had overturned the Liturgy also, or at least weeded it from every expression that bears testimony to the Deity of the Saviour, and the efficacious influence of the Holy Spirit. I bless God that you are far otherwise minded.

I hope, however, though you should not think yourself at liberty to repeat your subscription, the Lord will make you comfortable and useful in your present rank as a curate. Preferment is not necessary, either to our peace or usefulness. We may live and die contentedly, without the honours and emoluments which aspiring men thirst after, if he be pleased to honour us with a dispensation to preach *his* Gospel, and to crown our endeavours with a blessing. He that winneth souls is wise; wise in the choice of the highest end he can propose to himself in this life; wise in the improvement of the only means by which this desirable end can be attained. Wherever we cast our eyes, the bulk of the people are ignorant, immoral, careless. They live without God in the world; they are neither awed by his authority, nor affected by his goodness, nor enabled to trust to his promises, nor disposed to aim at his glory. If, perhaps, they have a serious interval, or some comparative sobriety of character, they ground their hopes upon their own doings, endeavours, or purposes; and

treat the inexpressible love of God revealed in Christ, and the Gospel-method of salvation by faith in his name, with neglect, often with contempt. They have preachers, whom perhaps they hear with some pleasure, because they neither alarm their consciences by insisting on the spirituality and sanction of the divine law, nor offend their pride by publishing the humiliating doctrines of that Gospel, which is the power of God through faith unto salvation. Therefore what they do speak, they speak in vain; the world grows worse and worse under their instructions; infidelity and profligacy abound more and more; for God will own no other doctrine but what the apostle calls the truth as it is in Jesus; that doctrine which drives the sinner from all his vain pleas, and points out the Lord Jesus Christ as the only ground of hope, the supreme object of desire, as appointed of God to be wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, to all who believe in his name. When ministers themselves are convinced of sin, and feel the necessity of an Almighty Saviour, they presently account their former gain but loss, and determine, with the apostle, to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified. In proportion as they do this, they are sure to be wondered at, laughed at, and railed at, if the providence of God, and the constitution of their country, secure them from severer treatment.—But they have this invaluable compensation, that they no longer speak without effect. In a greater or less degree a change takes place in their auditories:—the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed;—sinners are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God;—sinful practices are forsaken; and a new course of life in the converts, evidences that they have not followed cunningly devised fables, nor taken up

with uncertain notions; but that God has indeed quickened them by his Spirit, and given them an understanding to know him that is true. The preachers, likewise, while they attempt to teach others, are taught themselves: a blessing descends upon their studies and labours, upon their perusal of the Scripture, upon their attention to what passes within them and around them: the events of every day contribute to throw light upon the word of God; their views of divine truth grow more enlarged, connected, and comprehensive; many difficulties which perplexed them at their first setting out, trouble them no more; the God whom they serve, and on whom they wait, reveals to them those great things, which, though plainly expressed in the letter of the Scripture, cannot be understood and realized without divine teaching, 1 Cor. ii. 9—15. Thus they go on from strength to strength, hard things become easy, and a divine light shines upon their paths. Opposition from men perhaps may increase: they may expect to be represented as those who turn the world upside down; the cry μεγαλη ἡ Αρτεμις* will be raised against them, the gates of the temple of preferment will be seldom open to them; but they will have the unspeakable consolation of applying to themselves those lively words of the apostle, ὡς λυπουμενοι, αει δε χαιροντες· ὡς πτωχοι, πολλους δε πλουτιζοντες· ὡς μηδεν εχοντες, και παντα κατεχοντες †.

It is the strain of evident sincerity which runs through your letters, that gives me a pleasing confidence the Lord is with you. A disinterested desire of knowing the truth, with a willingness to follow it through all disadvantages, is a preparation of the heart which only God can give. He has directed you to the right method, searching the Scripture, with prayer. Go on, and may

* Great is Diana. † 2 Cor. vi. 10.

his blessing attend you. You may see from what I have written above, what is the desire of my heart for you. But I am not impatient. Follow your heavenly leader, and in his own time and manner he will make your way plain. I have travelled the path before you, I see what you yet want; I cannot impart it to you, but he can, and I trust he will. It will rejoice my soul to be any way assistant to you; but I am afraid I should not afford you much, either profit or satisfaction, by entering upon a dry defence of creeds and articles.

The truths of Scripture are not like mathematical theorems, which present exactly the same ideas to every person who understands the terms. The word of God is compared to a mirror, 2 Cor. iii. 18.; but it is a mirror in which the longer we look, the more we see; the view will be still growing upon us; and still we shall see but in part while on this side eternity. When our Lord pronounced Peter blessed, declaring he had learnt that which flesh and blood could not have taught him, yet Peter was at that time much in the dark. The sufferings and death of Jesus, though the only and necessary means of his salvation, were an offence to him. But he lived to glory in what he once could not bear to hear of. Peter had received grace to love the Lord Jesus, to follow him, to venture all, and to forsake all for him: these first good dispositions were of God, and they led to further advances. So it is still. By nature, self rules in the heart; when this idol is brought low, and we are truly willing to be the Lord's, and to apply to him for strength and direction, that we may serve him, the good work is begun; for it is a truth that holds universally and without exception, a man can receive nothing except it be *given* him from heaven. The Lord first *finds* us when we are thinking of some-

thing else, Isaiah lxv. 1. and then we begin to seek him in good earnest, and he has promised to be *found* of us. People may, by industry and natural abilities, make themselves masters of the external evidences of Christianity, and have much to say for and against different schemes and systems of sentiments; but all this while the heart remains untouched. True religion is not a science of the head, so much as an inward and heart-felt perception, which casts down imaginations, and every ὑψωμα that exalteth itself in the mind, and brings every thought into a sweet and willing subjection to Christ by *faith*. Here the learned have no real advantage above the ignorant; both see when the eyes of the understanding are enlightened; till then both are equally blind. And the first lesson in the school of Christ is to become a little child, sitting simply at his feet, that we may be made wise unto salvation.

I was not only prevented beginning my letter so soon as I wished, but have been unusually interrupted since I began it. Often, as soon as I could well take the pen in hand, I have been called away to attend company and intervening business. Though I persuade myself, after what I have formerly said, you will put a favourable construction upon my delay, yet it has given me some pain. I set a great value upon your offer of friendship, which I trust will not be interrupted on either side, by the freedom with which we mutually express our difference of sentiments, when we are constrained to differ. You please me with intrusting me with the first rough draught of your thoughts; and you may easily perceive by my manner of writing, that I place equal confidence in your candour. I shall be glad to exchange letters as often as it suits us, without constraint, ceremony, or apology; and may he who is

always present with our hearts, make our correspondence useful. I pray God to be your sun and shield, your light and strength, to guide you with his eye, to comfort you with his gracious presence in your own soul, and to make you a happy instrument of comforting many.

LETTER II.

My Dear Friend, July 14, 1775.

I GLADLY adopt your address, and can assure you that the interchange of every letter unites my heart more closely to you. I am glad to find that your views of articles and creeds are not likely to hinder you from going forward in your present situation: and if, without contracting your usefulness, they only prove a bar to your preferment, I am sure it will be no grief of mind to you at the hour of death, or the day of judgment, that you were enabled to follow the dictates of conscience, in opposition to all the pleas of custom or interest.—Since, therefore, I have no desire of shaking your resolves, may we not drop this subject entirely? For indeed I act but an awkward part in it, being by no means myself an admirer of articles and creeds, or disposed to be a warm advocate for church power. The propriety of our national establishment, or of any other, is what I have not much to do with; I found it as it is, nor have I influence to alter it were I willing. The question in which I was concerned was simply, Whether I, *rebus sic stantibus*, could submit to it, so as conscientiously to take a designation to the ministry under it? I thought I could; I accordingly did, and I am thankful that I never have seen cause to repent it.

You seem gently to charge me with a want of candour in what I observed or apprehended concerning the gentleman of the Feathers Tavern. If I mistake not, (for I retain no copies of my letters,) I expressed myself with a double restriction, by first saying the *leaders* of that society, and then adding, or *some of them at least*. I apprehend your candour will hardly lead you to suppose, that there are *none* amongst them who would pull down the whole fabric, (that is, I mean so far as it crosses the Socinian scheme,) if it was left to their choice. I apprehend I may, without the least breach of candour, suppose that the exceptions which Mr. Lindsay has made to the Liturgy are not peculiar to himself. It seems plain in his case, and from his own writings, that the mere removal of subscriptions, which is the immediate and ostensible object of the clerical petition, could not have satisfied *him;* and it is past a doubt with me, that there are others of the clergy like-minded with him. Indeed I could wish to be thought candid by *you;* though, I confess, I am not a friend to that lukewarmness and indifference for truth, which bears the name of candour among many in the present day. I desire to maintain a spirit of candour and benevolence to all men, to wish them well, to do them every good office in my power, and commend what appears to me commendable in a Socinian, as readily as in a Calvinist. But with some people I can only go *usque ad aras*. I must judge of principles by the word of God, and of the tree by its fruit. I meddle with no man's final state; because I know that he who is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins, can do it whenever, and to whomsoever, he is pleased: yet I firmly believe, and I make no scruple of proclaiming it, that swearers, drunkards, adulterers, *continuing such*, cannot inherit the kingdom

of God: and I look with no less compassion upon some persons whose characters in common life may be respectable, when I see them unhappily blinded by their own wisdom; and while they account themselves, and are accounted by many others, master-builders in Zion, rejecting the only foundation upon which a sinner's hope can be safely built.

I am far from thinking the Socinians all hypocrites, but I think they are all in a most dangerous error; nor do their principles exhibit to my view a whit more of the genuine fruits of Christianity than deism itself. You say, "If they be sincere, and fail not for want of dili-"gence in searching, I cannot help thinking that God "will not condemn them for an inevitable defect in their "understandings." Indeed, my friend, I have such a low opinion of man in his depraved state, that I believe no one has real sincerity in religious matters till God bestows it; and when *he* makes a person sincere in his desires after truth, he will assuredly guide him to the possession of it in due time, as our Lord speaks, John vi. 44, 45. To suppose that any persons can sincerely seek the way of salvation, and yet miss it through an inevitable defect of their understandings, would contradict the plain promises of the Gospel, such as, Matt. vii. 7, 8. John vii. 16, 17.; but to suppose that nothing is necessary to be known, which some persons who profess sincerity cannot receive, would be in effect to make the Scripture a nose of wax, and open a wide door for scepticism. I am not a judge of the heart; but I may be sure that whoever makes the foundation-stone a rock of offence cannot be sincere in his inquiries. He may study the Scripture accurately, but he brings his own preconceived sentiments with him, and instead of submitting them to the touchstone of truth, he makes them

a rule by which he interprets. That they who lean to their own understandings should stumble and miscarry, I cannot wonder; for the same God who has promised to fill the hungry with good things, has threatened to send the rich empty away. So Matth. xi. 25. It is not through defect of understanding, but a want of simplicity and humility, that so many stumble like the blind at noon-day, and can see nothing of those great truths which are written in the Gospel as with a sun-beam.

You wish me to explain myself concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. I will try; yet I know I cannot, any further than as he who taught me shall be pleased to bear witness in your heart to what I say. My first principle in religion is what the Scripture teaches me of the utter depravity of human nature, in connexion with the spirituality and sanction of the law of God. I believe we are by nature sinners, by practice universally transgressors; that we are dead in trespasses and sins; and that the bent of our natural spirit is enmity against the holiness, government, and grace of God. Upon this ground, I see, feel, and acknowledge the necessity of such a salvation as the Gospel proposes; which, at the same time that it precludes boasting, and stains the pride of all human glory, affords encouragement to those who may be thought, or who may think themselves, the weakest or the vilest of mankind. I believe, that whatever notions a person may take up from education or system, no one ever did, or ever will, feel himself and own himself to be such a lost, miserable, hateful sinner, unless he be powerfully and supernaturally convinced by the Spirit of God.—There is, when God pleases, a certain light thrown into the soul, which differs not merely in degree, but in kind, *toto genere*, from any thing that can be effected or produced by moral suasion or argu-

ment. But, (to take in another of your queries,) the Holy Spirit teaches or reveals no new truths, either of doctrine or precept, but only enables us to understand what is already revealed in the Scripture. Here a change takes place, the person that was spiritually blind, begins to see. The sinner's character, as described in the word of God, he finds to be a description of himself; that he is afar off, a stranger, a rebel; that he has hitherto lived in vain. Now he begins to see the necessity of an atonement, an advocate, a shepherd, a comforter: he can no more trust to his own wisdom, strength, and goodness; but, accounting all his former gain but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, he renounces every other refuge, and ventures his all upon the person, work, and promise of the Redeemer. In this way, I say, he will find the doctrine of the Trinity not only a proposition, but a principle; that is, from his own wants and situation, he will have an abiding conviction, that the Son and Holy Spirit are God, and must be possessed of the attributes and powers of Deity, to support the offices the Scriptures assign them, and to deserve the confidence and worship the Scriptures require to be placed in them, and paid to them. Without this awakened state of mind, a divine, reputed orthodox, will blunder wretchedly, even in defending his own opinions. I have seen laboured defences of the Trinity, which have given me not much more satisfaction than I should probably receive from a dissertation upon the rainbow, composed by a man blind from his birth. In effect, the knowledge of God cannot be attained by studious discussion on our parts; it must be by a revelation on his part, Matth. xi. 27. and xvi. 17.; a revelation, not objectively of new truth, but subjectively of new light in us. Then he that runs may read. Per-

haps you may not quite understand my meaning, or not accede to my sentiment at present; I have little doubt, however, but the time is coming when you will. I believe the Lord God has given *you* that sincerity, which he never disappoints.

Far be it from me to arrogate infallibility to myself, or to any writer or preacher; yet, blessed be God, I am not left to float up and down the uncertain tide of opinion, in those points wherein the peace of my soul is nearly concerned. I know, yea, I infallibly know, whom I have believed. I am under no more doubt about the way of salvation than of the way to London. I cannot be deceived, because the word of God cannot deceive me. It is impossible, however, for me to give you or any person full satisfaction concerning my evidence, because it is of an experimental nature; Rev. ii. 17. In general, it arises from the views I have received of the power, compassion, and grace of Jesus, and a consciousness, that I, from a conviction of my sin and misery, have fled to him for refuge, intrusted and devoted myself and my all to him. Since my mind has been enlightened, every thing within me, and every thing around me, confirms and explains to me what I read in Scripture; and though I have reason enough to distrust my own judgment every hour, yet I have no reason to question the great essentials, which the Lord himself hath taught me.

Besides a long letter, I send you a great book. A part of it, (for I do not ask you to read the whole,) may perhaps explain my meaning better than I have leisure to do myself. I set a high value upon this book of Mr. Halyburton's; so that, unless I could replace it with another, I know not if I would part with it for its weight in gold. The first and longest treatise is, in my judg-

ment, a master-piece; but I would chiefly wish you to peruse the Essay concerning Faith, towards the close of the book. I need not beg you to read it carefully, and to read it all. The importance of the subject, its immediate connexion with your inquiries, and the accuracy of the reasoning, will render the motive of *my request* unnecessary. I connot style him a very elegant writer; and, being a Scotsman, he abounds with the Scottish idiom. But you will prefer truth to ornament. I long to hear your opinion of it. It seems to me so adapted to some things that have passed between us, as if written on purpose.

The Inquiry concerning Regeneration and Justification, which stands last in the book, I do not desire or even wish you to read; but if you should, and then think that you have read a speculation more curious than useful, I shall not contradict you. I think it must appear to you in that light; but it was bound up with the rest, and therefore could not stay behind; but I hope the Essay on Faith will please you.

I take great pleasure in your correspondence, still more in the thought of your friendship, which I hope to cultivate to the utmost, and to approve myself, sincerely and affectionately yours.

LETTER III.

My Dear Friend, August 11, 1775.

NEXT week I go to London, where I purpose, (if nothing unforeseen prevents,) to stay a month. Many things, which must necessarily be attended to before my departure, abridge me of that leisure which I could wish to employ in answering your last. However, I

will spare you what I can. I thank you for yours. Your objections neither displease nor weary me.—While truth is the object of your inquiry, the more freedom you use with me the better. Nor do they surprise me; for I have formerly made the like objections myself. I have stood upon your ground, and I continue to hope you will one day stand upon mine. As I have told you more than once, I do not mean to dictate to you, or to wish you to receive any thing upon my *ipse dixit;* but, in the simplicity of friendship, I will give you my thoughts from time to time upon the points you propose, and leave the event to the divine blessing.

I am glad you do not account the Socinians master-builders. However, they esteem themselves so, and are so esteemed, not only by a few, (as you think,) but by many. I fear Socinianism spreads rapidly amongst us, and bids fair to be the prevailing scheme in this land, especially with those who profess to be the thinking part. The term *Arminian,* as at present applied, is very indiscriminate, and takes in a great variety of persons and sentiments, amongst whom, I believe, there are many who hold the fundamental truths of the Gospel, and live a life of faith in the Son of God. I am far from supposing that God will guide every *sincere* person exactly to adopt *all* my sentiments. But there are *some* sentiments which I believe essential to the very state and character of a true Christian.—And these make him a Christian; not merely by being his acknowledged sentiments, but by a certain peculiar manner in which he possesses them. There is a certain important change takes place in the heart, by the operation of the Spirit of God, before the soundest and most orthodox sentiments can have their proper influence upon us. This work, or change, the Scripture describes by vari-

ous names, each of which is designed to teach us the marvellous effects it produces, and the almighty power by which it is produced. It is sometimes called a new-birth, John iii. 3.; sometimes a new creature or new creation, as 2 Cor. v. 17.; sometimes the causing light to shine out of darkness, 2 Cor. iv. 6.; sometimes the opening the eyes of the blind, Acts xxvi. 18.; sometimes the raising the dead to life, Ephes. ii. 5. Till a person has experienced this change, he will be at a loss to form a right conception of it: but it means, not being proselyted to an opinion, but receiving a principle of divine life and light in the soul. And till this is received, the things of God, the truths of the Gospel, cannot be rightly discerned or understood, by the utmost powers of fallen man, who, with all his wisdom, reason, and talents, is still but what the apostle calls the natural man, till the power of God visits his heart, 1 Cor. ii. 14. This work is sometimes wrought sud denly, as in the case of Lydia, Acts xvi. 14.; at other times very gradually. A person who before was a stranger even to the form of godliness, or at best content with a mere form—finds new thoughts arising in his mind, feels some concern about his sins, some desire to please God, some suspicions that all is not right. —He examines his views of religion, hopes the best of them, and yet cannot rest satisfied in them. To-day, perhaps, he thinks himself fixed; to-morrow he will be all uncertainty. He inquires of others, weighs, measures, considers, meets with sentiments which he had not attended to, thinks them plausible; but is presently shocked with objections or supposed consequences, which he finds himself unable to remove. As he goes on in his inquiry, his difficulties increase. New doubts arise in his mind; even the Scriptures perplex him, and

appear to assert contrary things. He would sound the depths of truth by the plummet of his reason; but he finds his line is too short. Yet even now the man is under a guidance, which will at length lead him right. The importance of the subject takes up his thoughts, and takes off the relish he once had for the things of the world. He reads, he prays, he strives, he resolves; sometimes inward embarrassments and outward temptations bring him to his wit's end. He almost wishes to stand where he is, and inquire no more: but he cannot stop.—At length he begins to *feel* the inward depravity, which he had before owned as an opinion; a sense of sin and guilt cut him out new work. Here reasoning will stand him in no stead. This is a painful change of mind; but it prepares the way for a blessing. It silences some objections better than a thousand arguments, it cuts the comb of his own wisdom and attainments, it makes him weary of working for life, and teaches him, in God's due time, the meaning of that text, "To him that worketh not, but believeth in him "who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for "righteousness." Then he learns, that Scriptural faith is a very different thing from a *rational assent* to the Gospel,—that it is the immediate gift of God, Ephes. ii. 8.; the operation of God, Col. ii. 12.; that Christ is not only the object, but the author and finisher of faith, Heb. xii. 2.; and that faith is not so properly a part of that obedience we *owe to God*, as an inestimable benefit we *receive from him* for Christ's sake, Phil. i. 29. which is the medium of our justification, Rom. v. 1. and the principle by which we are united to Christ, (as the branch to the vine,) John xvii. 21. I am well aware of the pains taken to put a different sense upon these and other seemingly mysterious passages of Scripture;

but thus far we speak that which we know, and testify that which we have seen. I have described a path in which I have known many led, and in which I have walked myself.

The Gospel, my dear sir, is a salvation appointed for those who are ready to perish, and is not designed to put them in a way to save themselves by their own works. It speaks to us as condemned already, and calls upon us to believe in a crucified Saviour, that we may receive redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins. And the Spirit of God, by the Gospel, first convinces us of unbelief, sin, and misery; and then, by revealing the things of Jesus to our minds, enables us, as helpless sinners, to come to Christ, to receive him, to behold him; or, in other words, to believe in him, and expect pardon, life, and grace from him; renouncing every hope and aim in which we once rested, "and accounting all things loss and dung for the excel-"lency of the knowledge of Christ," John vi. 35. Isa. xlv. 22. with John vi. 40. Col. ii. 6. In some of Omicron's letters you will find my thoughts more at large upon these subjects than I have now time to write them. For a further illustration I refer you to the MSS. sent herewith. The first part written in short-hand, does not so immediately concern our present point as the second, which you may read without a key. It relates to a matter of indisputable fact, concerning a person with whom, (as you will perceive,) I was well acquainted. You may depend upon the truth of every tittle. I intrust it to you in the confidence of friendship, and beg that it may not go out of your hands, and that when you have perused it, you would return it, sealed up, by a safe conveyance to my house. You will see in it the sentiments of a man of great learning, sound reasoning,

an amiable and irreproachable character, and how little he accounted of all these advantages, when the Lord was pleased to enlighten his mind.

Though we have not exactly the same view of human depravity, yet, as we both agree to take our measure of it from the word of God, I trust, we shall not always differ about it. Adam was created in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, Ephes. iv. 24. This moral image, I believe, was totally lost by sin. In that sense he died the day, the moment he ate the forbidden fruit. God was no longer his joy and delight; he was averse from the thoughts of his presence, and would, (if possible,) have hid himself from him. His natural powers, though doubtless impaired, were not destroyed. Man by nature is still capable of great things. His understanding, reason, memory, imagination, &c. sufficiently proclaim that the Hand that made him is divine. He is, as Milton says of Beelzebub, majestic though in ruins. He can reason, invent, and by application attain a considerable knowledge in natural things. The exertions of human genius, as specified in the characters of some philosophers, poets, orators, &c are wonderful. But man cannot know, love, trust, or serve his Maker, unless he be renewed in the spirit of his mind. God has preserved in him likewise some feelings of benevolence, pity, some sense of natural justice and truth, &c. without which there could be no society: but these, I apprehend, are little more than instincts, by which the world is kept in some small degree of order; but, being under the direction of pride and self, do not deserve the name of virtue and goodness, because the exercise of them does not spring from a principle of love to God, nor is directed to his glory, or regulated by the rule of his word, till a principle of grace

is superadded. You think, I will not say, " that God, " judicially in punishment of one man's sin, added these " corruptions to all his posterity." Let us suppose, that the punishment annexed to eating the forbidden fruit, had been the loss of Adam's rational powers, and that he should be degraded to the state and capacity of a brute. In this condition, had he begotten children after the fall in his own likeness, his nature being previously changed, they must have been, of course, brutes like himself; for he could not convey to them those original powers which he had lost. Will this illustrate my meaning? Sin did not deprive him of rationality, but spirituality. His nature became earthly, sensual, yea, devilish: and this fallen nature, this carnal mind, which is enmity against God, which is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be, Rom. viii. 7. we universally derive from him. Look upon children; they presently show themselves averse from good, but exceedingly propense to evil. This they can learn even without a master; but ten thousand instructors and instructions cannot instil good into them, so as to teach them to love their Creator, unless a divine power co-operates. Just as it is with the earth, which produces weeds spontaneously; but if you only see a cabbage, or an apple tree, you are sure it was planted or sown there, and did not spring from the soil. I know many hard questions may be started upon this subject; but the Lord in due time will clear his own cause, and vindicate his own ways. I leave all difficulties with him. It is sufficient for me, that Scripture asserts, and experience proves, that it is thus in fact, Rom. iii. 9—21. Job xiv. 4. Thus, we have not only forfeited our happiness by transgression, but are, by our depravity, incapable of it, and have no more desire or taste for such a state as the Scripture describes heaven to be, than a

man born deaf can have for a concert of music. And therefore our Lord declares, that except a man be born again, he not only *shall not*, but *cannot* see the kingdom of God. Hence a twofold necessity of a Saviour, his blood for the pardon of our sins—his life, spirit, and grace, to quicken our souls, and form us anew for himself, that we may feel his love, and show forth his praise.

St. Paul, before his conversion, was not sincere in the sense I hope you to be: he thought himself in the right, without doubt, as many have done when they killed God's servants, John xvi. 2. He was blindly and obstinately zealous: I think he did not enter into the merits of the cause, or inquire into facts with that attention which sincerity would have put him upon. You think that his sincerity and zeal were the very things that made him a chosen instrument; he himself speaks of them as the very things that made him peculiarly unworthy of that honour, 1 Cor. xv. 9. and he tells us, that he was set forth as a pattern of the Lord's long suffering and mercy, that the very chief of sinners might be encouraged, 1 Tim. i. 15, 16. Had he been sincerely desirous to know whether Jesus was the Messiah, there was enough in his character, doctrines, miracles, and the prophecies concerning him, to have cleared up the point; but he took it for granted he was right in his opinion, and hurried blindly on, and was, (as he said himself,) exceedingly mad against them.—Such a kind of sincerity is common enough. People believe themselves right, and therefore treat others with scorn or rage; appeal to the Scriptures, but first lay down their own preconceived sentiments for truths, and then examine what Scriptures they can find to countenance them. Surely a person's thinking himself

right, will not give a sanction to all that he does under that persuasion.

Ignorance and obstinacy are in themselves sinful, and no plea of sincerity will exempt from the danger of being under their influence. Isa. xxvii. 11. Luke vi. 39. It appears to me, that though you will not follow any man implicitly, you are desirous of discovering your mistakes, supposing you are mistaken in any point of importance. You read and examine the word of God, not to find arms wherewith to defend your sentiments at all events, but to know whether they are defensible or not. You pray for God's light and teaching, and in this search you are willing to risk what men are commonly much afraid of hazarding—character, interest, preferment, favour, &c. A sincerity of this kind I too seldom meet with; when I do, I account it a token for good, and am ready to say, "No man can do this, "except God be with him." However, sincerity is not conversion; but I believe it is always a forerunner of it.

I would not be uncharitable and censorious, hasty and peremptory, in judging my fellow-creatures. But if I acknowledge the word of God, I cannot avoid forming my judgment upon it. It is true, I cannot look into people's hearts; but hearts and principles are delineated to my hand in the Scripture. I read that no murderer has eternal life in him; I read likewise, "If any "man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathe-"ma;" and therefore I conclude, that there are *speculative errors*, as heinous in their guilt, as destructive in their effects, as murder; and that the most moral, regular man, as to social life, if he loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, is, in the sight of God, the Judge of all, as displeasing as a murderer. It has pleased God, for the

peace and support of society, to put a black mark upon those sins which affect the peace and welfare of our neighbour, such as adultery and murder. But undoubtedly the sins committed immediately against himself must be more heinous than any which offend our fellow-creatures. The second commandment, Matth. xxii. 39. is like the first; but it depends upon it, and is therefore inferior to it. Men ordinarily judge otherwise. To live regardless of God and the Gospel, is looked upon as a peccadillo, in comparison with offences against society. But sooner or later it will appear otherwise to all. A parcel of robbers may pique themselves upon the justice, honour, and truth they observe towards one another; but because they set up a petty interest, which is inconsistent with the public good, they are deservedly accounted villains, and treated as such, notwithstanding their petty morality among themselves. Now, such a company of robbers bears a much greater proportion to a whole nation, than a nation, or all the nations of the earth, bears to the great God. Our dependence upon him is absolute; our obligations to him infinite. In vain shall men plead their moral discharge of relative duties to each other, if they fail in the unspeakably greater relation under which they stand to God; and therefore, when I see people living without God in the world, as all do till they are converted, I cannot but judge them in a dangerous state; not because I take pleasure in censuring, or think myself authorized to pass sentence upon my fellow-creatures, but because the Scripture decides expressly on the case, and I am bound to take my sentiments from thence.

The jailer was certainly a Christian when baptized, as you observe. He trembled; he cried out, "What

" must I do to be saved?" Paul did not bid him amend his life, but believe in the Lord Jesus. He believed, and rejoiced. But the Lord blessed the apostle's words, to produce in him that saving faith, which filled him with joy and peace. It was, as I observed before, something more than an assent to the proposition, that Jesus is the Christ; a resting in him for forgiveness and acceptance, and a cleaving to him in love. No other faith will purify the heart, work by love, and overcome the world.

I need not have pleaded want of leisure as an excuse for a short letter, for I have written a long one. I feel myself much interested in your concerns; and your unexpected frank application to me, (though you well know the light in which I appear to some people,) I consider as a providential call, which binds me to your service. I hope our correspondence will be productive of happy effects, and that we shall both one day rejoice in it.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

My Dear Friend, September 6, 1775.

I BEGIN to fear that I shall fall under a suspicion of unkindness and forgetfulness towards you; and therefore I am willing to write a line by way of prevention, though I have not leisure to attempt any thing like an answer to the letter you put into my hand the evenining before I left O****; must therefore content myself with a tender of affection and respect, and an inquiry after your welfare.

Your letter will give me an opportunity of saying

something further when time shall admit; but an endeavour to answer all the objections that may be started between us, in a way of reasoning, would require a volume, and would likewise interfere with the leading principle upon which my hope of giving you satisfaction in due time is grounded. You seem to expect that *I* should remove your difficulties; but it is my part only to throw in a word occasionally, as a witness of what the Lord has been pleased to teach me from the Scriptures, and to wait for the rest, till he, (who alone is able,) shall be pleased to communicate the same views to you: for till we see and judge by the same medium, and are agreed in the fundamental point, that faith is not the effect of reasoning, but a special gift of God, which he bestows when and to whom he pleases, it will not be possible for me to convince you by dint of argument. I believe, as I have observed before, that he has already given you a desire to know his will; and therefore I trust he will not disappoint your search. At present I think you want one thing, which it is not in my power to impart; I mean such a sense of the depravity of human nature, and the state of all mankind considered as sinners, as may make you feel the utter impossibility of attaining to the peace and hope of the Gospel in any other way, than by renouncing all hope of succeeding by any endeavours of your own, further than by humbly waiting at the throne of grace, for power to cast yourself, without terms and conditions, upon him who is able to save to the uttermost. We must feel ourselves sick, before we can duly prize the great Physician: and feel a sentence of death in ourselves, before we can effectually trust in God who raiseth the dead.

I have not brought your sermons with me; for I

thought I should not have time to read them attentively, while in this hurrying place. I purpose to consider them with care, and to give you my thoughts with frankness, when I return. However, if they are upon the plan intimated in your letter, I will venture to say one thing before-hand, that they will not answer your desired end. I am persuaded you wish to be useful —to reclaim sinners from their evil ways, to inspire them with a love to God, and a sincere aim to walk in obedience to his will. May I not venture to appeal to yourself, that you meet with little success; that the people to whom you preach, though they perhaps give you a patient hearing, yet remain as they were, unchanged and unholy? It must be so: there is but one sort of preaching which God blesses to these purposes—that which makes all the world guilty before God, and sets forth Jesus Christ, (as the brazen serpent was proposed by Moses,) that guilty and condemned sinners, by looking to him, and believing on his name, may be healed and saved. The most pressing exhortations to repentance and amendment of life, unless they are enforced in a certain way, which only God can teach, will leave our hearers much as they find them. When we meet, or when I have leisure to write from home, I will trouble you with my thoughts more at large. Till then, permit me to assure you of my sincere regard and best wishes, and that I am, &c.

LETTER V.

My Dear Friend, October 21, 1775.

THE calls and engagements which I told you engrossed and anticipated my time when I wrote last, have continued without any intermission hitherto, and I am still far behind-hand with my business. I am willing to hope, that the case has been much the same with you, and that want of leisure has been the only cause of my not having been pleasured with so much as a note from you since my return from London.

I am loath, for my own sake, to charge your silence to any unwillingness of continuing that intercourse which I have been, and still find myself, desirous to improve on my part. For though we are not agreed in our views, yet, while our preliminary agreement, to allow mutual freedom, and to exercise mutual candour, in expressing our sentiments, subsists, we may, and I hope shall, be glad to hear from each other. It may seem to intimate I have a better opinion of myself than of you, that while I seem confident your freedom will not offend me, I feel now and then a fear, lest mine should prove displeasing to you. But friendship is a little suspicious when exercised with long silence; and a plain declaration of my sentiments has, more than once, put amiable and respectable persons to the full trial of their patience.

I now return your sermons: I thank you for the perusal. I see much in them that I approve, and nothing in them but what I formerly espoused. But in a course of years, a considerable alteration has taken place in my judgment and experience. I hope, yea,

I may boldly say, I am sure, not for the worse. Then I was seeking, and now through mercy I have found, the pearl of great price. It is both the prayer and the hope of my heart, that a day is coming when you shall make the same acknowledgment. From your Letters and Sermons, I am encouraged to address you in our Lord's words, "Thou art not far from the kingdom "of God." I am persuaded the views you have received will not suffer you to remain where you are. But fidelity obliges me to add, "Yet one thing thou "lackest." That "one thing" I trust the Lord will both show you, and bestow upon you, in his due time. You speak somewhere of "atoning for disobedience by re- "pentance."—Ah! my dear sir, when we are brought to estimate our disobedience by comparing it with such a sense of the majesty, holiness, and authority of God, and the spirituality, extent, and sanction of his holy law, as he, and he only, can impress upon the heart of a sinner, we shall be convinced that nothing but the blood of the Son of God can atone for the smallest instance of disobedience.

I intimated, in my letter from London, one defect of your scheme, which will probably be the first to engage your notice. I am sure you have a desire to be useful to the souls of men, to be an instrument of reclaiming them from that course of open wickedness, or lifeless formality, in which you see them enslaved; and, in a word, to prevail with them to live soberly, righteously, and godly, according to the just and comprehensive sense you have given of those words, in your sermon on Tit. ii. 11, 12. Now inward experience, and a pretty extensive observation of what passes abroad, have so perfectly convinced me there is but one mode of preaching which the Holy Spirit owns to the producing these effects, that I am not afraid to pronounce confidently

you will not have the desires of your heart gratified upon your present plan: the people will give you a hearing, and remain just as they are, till the Lord leads you to speak to them as criminals condemned already, and whose first essential step it is, to seek forgiveness by the blood of Jesus, and a change of heart and state by his grace, before they can bring forth any fruit acceptable to God.

As I have little time for writing, and little hope of succeeding in a way of argumentation, I have substituted, instead of a longer letter, the heads of some sermons I preached nine or ten years ago, on our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. However, when I have heard that you are well, and that you still are disposed to correspond with me, I shall be ready to give a more particular answer to the subjects you pointed out to me in the letter you favoured me with the day before I left London. I pray God to bless you in all your ways, and beg you to believe, that I am, with sincerity, &c.

LETTER VI.

My Dear Friend, October 28.

IT never entered my pericranium that you expected I should fully and directly answer your letter while I was in London; and yet you reasonably might, as you knew nothing of my engagements: but indeed it was impracticable; I could only send you a hasty line, as a token that I remembered you. I informed you, when I returned, that I was just going out again. Since I came home the second time, I have been engrossed by things that would admit of no delay; and at length, not having so much as a note from you, I thought I would wait till I heard further. But from first to last it was my inten-

tion, and I think my promise to answer, in the manner you proposed, as soon as I could. And even now I must beg a little longer time. Believe me, that as the wise and good providence of God brought us together, without any expectation of mine, I will do all in my power to preserve the connexion, and particularly by giving my thoughts on such questions as you propose. And though, to consider your questions in the manner you wish, and to point out the agreement of detached texts, (as they occur,) with my views, seems in prospect to require a volume rather than a sheet, yet I am not discouraged; only I beg you to make allowances for other things, and to be assured, that, *before* I had the pleasure of corresponding with you, I had very little spare time. Expect then the best satisfaction I am able to give you, as soon as possible. To prepare the way, I will try hard for a little leisure, to give you a few thoughts upon yours, which came last night.

You complain that I have hitherto disappointed your expectations.—If you have preserved my first papers, I believe you will find, that I apprised you this might probably be the event, and certainly must, unless it should please God to make what I should write a means of giving you the same views with myself. I only proposed, as a witness, to bear a simple testimony to what I had seen and known. So far as you believed me sincere and unwilling to impose upon you, I thought you might admit, there was perhaps some weight in what I advanced, though for the present you could not see things in the same light. And if you allowed a possibility, that my changing the sentiments which I once held in common with yourself might be upon sufficient grounds, you would, as I trust you do, wait upon the great Teacher for his instruc-

tion; otherwise I did not expect to convince you, nor do I yet, only I am glad to put myself in his hands as an instrument.

You quite misunderstood what I spoke of the light and influence of the Spirit of God. He reveals to me no new truths, but has only shown me the meaning of his own written word; nor is this light a particular revelation; it is common to all who are born again. And thus, though you and I cannot fully agree about it, yet I almost daily meet with persons from the east, west, north, and south, whom, though I never saw them before, I find we understand each other at once. This, (as you bid me be explicit,) is the one thing which you at present lack. And I limited my expression to *one thing*, because it is our Lord's expression, and because that *one thing* includes many. As I said before, I cannot give it you; but the Lord can; and from the desire he has raised in your heart, I have a warm hope that he will. You place the whole stress of your inquiries upon reason: I am far from discarding reason, when it is enlightened and sanctified; but *spiritual things must be spiritually* discerned, and can be received and discerned no other way; for to our natural reason they are foolishness, 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15. Matth. xi. 25. This certain something I can no more describe to those who have not experienced it, than I could describe the taste of a pine-apple to a person who had never seen one. But Scriptural proofs might be adduced in abundance, yet not so as to give a solid conviction of it, till we actually experience it. Thus it was with my friend, whose case I sent you. When God gave him the key, (as he expressed it,) then the Scriptures were unlocked. His wishing himself a Deist some time before, was not from any libertine ex-

ceptions he made to the precepts of the Gospel, but from the perplexing embarrassments he had found by endeavouring to understand the doctrines by dint of reason, though reason in him was as strong and penetrating as in most men I ever met with. Upon your present plan, how can I hope to satisfy you, though even St. Paul asserts it, That the carnal mind is enmity against God? You will readily agree with me to the proposition as it stands in St. Paul's words, but I think will not so readily assent to what I have no more doubt than of my own existence, is the sense of it, That the heart of man, of any man, every man, however apparently amiable in his outward conduct, however benevolent to his fellow-creatures, however abundant and zealous in his devotions, is, by nature, enmity against God; not indeed against the idea he himself forms of God, but against the character which God has revealed of himself in the Scripture. Man is an enemy to the justice, sovereignty, and law of God, and to the alone method of salvation he has appointed in the Gospel by faith only; by such a faith, as it is no more in his power to contribute to the production of in himself, than he can contribute to raising the dead, or making a world. Whatever is of the flesh is flesh, and can rise no higher than its principle; but the Lord could convince you of this by a glance of thought.

But I must break off, for want both of room and time. Let me remind you of our agreement, to use and allow the greatest freedom, and not to be offended with what is meant well on either side. Something in your last letter made me apprehensive you were a little displeased with me. He that knows my heart, knows that I wish you well as my own soul.

The expression, of atoning for disobedience by re-

pentance, was in one of your sermons. I considered it as *unguarded;* but on my view of things, it were in a manner impossible I could use *that expression*, though perhaps too often unguarded myself.

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

My Dear Friend, November 17, 1775.

AT length I take up your favour of August 14, with design to give a more explicit answer. My delaying hitherto has been unavoidable; I am sorry to have your patience put to so long a trial, and should be more sorry, but that I consider, that in my former papers, sermons, Omicron's letters, &c. you already possess the whole, (in substance,) of what I have to offer. My present part is but *actum agere*, to repeat what I have elsewhere expressed, only with some variety and enlargement. You yourself well state the situation of our debate, when you say, "Nor in truth do you offer any "arguments to convince me, *nor does it seem very con-* "*sistent on your grounds so to do.* And if this impor- "tant change is to be brought about by the intervention "of some extraordinary impulse of the Holy Spirit, "and cannot be brought about without it; I do not "see any thing further that I have to do, than to keep "my mind as much unbiassed as I can, and to wait "and pray for it." I think my letter from London was to the purport of these your own words, though you seemed dissatisfied with it. While we see through a different medium, it will be easy for you to answer every text I might adduce in support of my sentiments, as you have those I have already brought, "That you

" understand them otherwise." In order to support my sense of one text, I should perhaps quote and argue from twenty more, and still " You would understand " them otherwise." The life of man, yea, of Methuselah, would hardly suffice to prove, object, and defend all that might be alleged on both sides in their way; and at last we should leave off as we began, more fully confirmed in our own opinions, unless the Lord, by his Holy Spirit, should be pleased to show the person who maintained the wrong side of the argument where his mistake lay. However, I mean to take some notice of your queries as they offer themselves.

The first which occurs is complicated. The substance I think is, whether such belief and aims as you possess, will stand you in no stead unless you likewise believe grace irresistible, predestination absolute, faith in supernatural impulses, &c.? You may have observed, I have several times waved speaking about predestination or election, not that I am ashamed of the doctrine; because if it be indeed absurd, shocking, and unjust, the blame will not deservedly fall upon me, for I did not invent it, but upon the Scriptures, where I am sure it is laid down in as plain terms, as that God created the heavens and the earth. I own I cannot but wonder that persons professing any reverence for the Bible should so openly and strongly declare their abhorrence of what the Bible so expressly teaches; namely, that there is a discrimination of persons by the grace and good pleasure of God, where by nature there is no difference; and that all things respecting the salvation of these persons is infallibly secured by a divine predestination.

I do not offer this as a rational doctrine, (though it be highly so to me,) but it is Scriptural, or else the

Scripture is a mere nose of wax, and without a determinate meaning. What ingenuity is needful to interpret many passages in a sense more favourable to our natural prejudices against God's sovereignty! Matth. xi. 25, 26. and xiii. 10—17. Mark xiii. 20—22. John xvii. *passim.* John x. 26. Rom. viii. 28—30. and ix. 13—24. and xi. 7. Eph. i. 4, 5. 1 Pet i. 2 Were I fond of disputing, as I am not, I think I could put a close reasoner hard to it, to maintain the truth of Scripture prophecies, or the belief of a particular providence, unless he would admit a divine predestination of causes and events as the ground of his arguments. However, as I said, I have chosen to wave the point; because, however true and necessary in itself, the knowledge and comprehension of it is not necessary to the being of a true Christian, though I can hardly conceive he can be an established, consistent believer without it. This doctrine is not the turning point between you and me; the nature of justification, and the method of a sinner's acceptance with God, are of much more immediate importance: and therefore, if I am to speak plainly, I must say, that I look upon your present sentiments, attainments, and advances, as you describe them, to constitute that kind of gain the apostle speaks of, and concerning which I hope you will one day be of his mind, and be glad to account it all loss, that you may *win Christ* and *be found in him,* "not having your own righteousness, "which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of "God by faith," Phil. iii. 4. 7—10. For as you tell me, you never remember a time when you were not conscious before God of great unworthiness, and intervals of earnest endeavours to serve him, though not with the same success, yet something in the same way

as at present; this is but saying, in other words, you never remember a time when old things passed away, and all things became new; and yet the apostle insists much upon this, 2 Cor. iv. 6. and v. 17. The convictions of natural conscience, and those which are wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit, are different not only in degree, but in kind; the light of a glow-worm and of the sun do not more essentially differ. The former are partial and superficial; leave us in possession of a supposed power of our own; are pacified by some appearances of an outward change; and make us no further sensible of the necessity of a Saviour, than to make our doings and duties, (if I may so express myself,) full weight, which perhaps might otherwise be a little deficient when brought to the balances of the sanctuary. But *truly spiritual* convictions give us far other views of sin; they lead us to a deep and awful consideration of the *root*, our total, absolute depravity, and our utter apostasy from God, by which we are incapable of doing good, as a dead man is of performing the functions of life. They lead us to the *rule* and *standard*, the strict, holy, inflexible law of God, which reaches to the thoughts and intents of the heart; requires perfect, universal, persevering obedience; denounces a curse upon every failure, Gal. iii. 10.; and affords neither place nor strength for repentance. Thus they sweep away every hope and refuge we had before, and fix upon us a sense of guilt and condemnation, from which there is no relief, till we can look to Jesus, as the wounded Israelites did to the brazen serpent; which was not to give efficacy to medicines and plasters of their own application, but to heal them completely of itself by looking at it. John iii. 14, 15. and vi. 40. Isaiah xliii. 22.

You wish me to explain my distinction between faith and rational assent; and though I know no two things in the world more clearly distinct in themselves, or more expressly distinguished in Scripture, yet I fear I may not easily make it appear to you. You allow faith, in your sense, to be the gift of God; but, in my sense, it is likewise wrought by the operation of God, Col. ii. 12. το υπερβαλλον μεγεθος της δυναμεως αυτου—κατα την ενεργειαν του κρατους της ισχυος αυτου*; that the same energy of the power of his strength, by which the dead body of Jesus was raised from the dead: can these strong expressions intend no more than a rational assent, such as we give to a proposition in Euclid? I believe fallen reason is, of itself, utterly incapable even of assenting to the great truths of revelation; it may assent to the terms in which they are proposed, but it must put its own interpretation upon them, or it would despise them. The natural man can neither receive nor discern the things of God: and if any one would be wise, the apostle's first advice to him is, Let him become a fool, that he may be wise; for the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God.

Indeed, when the heart is changed, and the mind enlightened, then reason is sanctified, and, if I may so say, baptized; renounces its curious disquisitions, and is content humbly to tread in the path of revelation. This is one difference, assent may be the act of our natural reason; faith is the effect of immediate almighty power. Another difference is, faith is always efficacious, "it worketh by love;" whereas assent is often given where it has little or no influence upon the conduct. Thus, for instance, every one will assent to this truth,

* Ephes. i. 19.

All men are mortal. Yet the greatest part of mankind, though they readily assent to the proposition, and it would be highly irrational to do otherwise, yet live as they might do if the reverse were true. But they who have divine faith, feel, as well as say, they are pilgrims and sojourners upon earth. Again, faith gives peace of conscience, access to God, and a sure evidence and subsistence of things not seen, Rom. v. 1, 2. Heb. xi. 1.—whereas a calm, dispassionate reasoner may be compelled to assent to the external arguments in favour of Christianity, and yet remain a total stranger to that communion with God, that spirit of adoption, that foretaste of glory, which is the privilege and portion of believers. So likewise faith overcomes the world, which rational assent will not do. Witness the lives and tempers of thousands, who yet would be affronted if their assent to the Gospel should be questioned. To sum up all in a word, "He that believes shall be "saved." But surely many who give a rational assent to the Gospel, live and die in those sins which exclude from the kingdom of God, Gal. v. 19—21. Faith is the effect of a principle of new life implanted in the soul, that was before dead in trespasses and sins; and it qualifies, not only for obeying the Saviour's precepts, but chiefly and primarily for receiving from and rejoicing in his fulness, admiring his love, his work, his person, his glory, his advocacy. It makes Christ precious, enthrones him in the heart, presents him as the most delightful object to our meditations; as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and strength; our root, head, life, shepherd, and husband. These are all Scriptural expressions and images, setting forth, so far as words can declare, what Jesus is in himself and to his believing people. But how cold is the comment

which rational assent puts upon very many passages, wherein the apostle Paul endeavours, (but in vain,) to express the fulness of his heart upon this subject. A most valued friend of mine, a clergyman now living, had for many years given a rational assent to the Gospel. He laboured with much earnestness upon your plan, was very exemplary in his whole conduct, preached almost incessantly, (two or three times every day in the week for years,) having a parish in the remote parts of *Yorkshire*, of great extent, and containing five or six different hamlets at some distance from each other. He succeeded likewise with his people, so far as to break them off from outward irregularities; and was mentioned in a letter to the Society for propagating the Gospel, (which I have seen in print,) as the most perfect example of a parish-priest which this nation, or perhaps this age, has produced. Thus he went on for many years, teaching his people what he knew, for he could teach them no more. He lived in such retirement and recess, that he was unacquainted with the persons and principles of any who are now branded as enthusiasts and methodists. One day reading Ephes. iii. in his Greek Testament, his thoughts were stopped by the word ανεξιχνιαστον, in verse 8. He was struck, and led to think with himself to this purpose: The apostle, when speaking of the love and riches of Christ, uses remarkable expressions; he speaks of heights, depths, and lengths, and breadths, and unsearchables, where I seem to find every thing plain, easy, and rational. He finds mysteries where I can perceive none. Surely though I use the words Gospel, faith, and grace, with him, my ideas of them must be different from his. This led him to a close examination of all his epistles, and, by the blessing of God, brought on a total change

in his views and preaching. He no longer set his people to keep a law of faith, to trust in their sincerity and endeavours, upon some general hope that Christ would help them out where they came short; but he preached Christ himself, as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. He felt himself, and laboured to convince others, that there is no hope for a sinner, but merely in the blood of Jesus, and no possibility of his doing any works acceptable to God, till he himself be first made accepted in the Beloved. Nor did he labour in vain. Now his preaching effected not only an outward reformation, but a real change of heart in very many of his hearers. The word was received, as Paul expresses it, not with a rational assent only, but with demonstration and power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; and their endeavours to observe the Gospel-precepts were abundantly more extensive, uniform, and successful, when they were brought to say with the apostle, "I am crucified with "Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ "liveth in me; and the life I live in the flesh, I live by "faith in the Son of God."

Such a change of views and sentiments I pray God my friend may experience. These things may appear uncouth to you at present, as they have done to many, who now bless God for showing them what their reason could never have taught them. My divinity is unfashionable enough at present, but it was not so always; you will find few books written from the æra of the Reformation, till a little before Laud's time, that set forth any other. There were few pulpits till after the Restoration from which any other was heard. A lamentable change has indeed since taken place; but God has not left himself without witnesses. You

think, though I disclaim infallibility, I arrogate too much in speaking with so much certainty. I am fallible indeed; but I am sure of the main points of doctrine I hold. I am not in the least doubt, whether salvation be of faith or of works; whether faith be of our own power or of God's operation; whether Christ's obedience, or our own, be the just ground of our hope; whether a man can truly call Jesus Lord, but by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. I have no more hesitation about these points, than I should have were I asked whether it was God or man who created the heavens and the earth. Besides, as I have more than once observed, your sentiments were once my own, so that I, who have travelled both roads, may have perhaps some stronger reasons to determine me which is the right, than you can have, who have only travelled one.

Your two sheets may lead me to write as many quires, if I do not check myself. I now come to the two queries you propose, the solution of which you think will clearly mark the difference of our sentiments. The substance of them is, 1st, Whether I think any sinner ever perished in his sins, (to whom the Gospel has been preached,) because God refused to supply him with such a proportion of his assistance as was absolutely necessary to his believing and repenting, or without his having previously rejected the incitements of his Holy Spirit? A full answer to this would require a sheet. But briefly, I believe that all mankind, being corrupt and guilty before God, he might, without impeachment to his justice, have left them all to perish, as we are assured he did the fallen angels. But he has pleased to show mercy, and mercy must be free. If the sinner has any claim to it, so far it is justice, not

mercy. HE, who is to be our Judge, assures us, that *few* find the gate that leadeth to life, while many throng the road to destruction. Your question seems to imply, that you think God either did make salvation equally *open to all*, or that it would have been more becoming his goodness to have done so.

But he is the potter, we are the clay; his ways and thoughts are above ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth. The judge of all the earth *will* do right. He has appointed a day, when he will manifest, to the conviction of *all*, that *He has done right*. Till then, I hold it best to take things upon his word, and not too harshly determine what it becomes Jehovah to do. Instead of saying what *I* think, let it suffice to remind you of what St. Paul thought, Rom. ix. 15—21. But further, I say, that unless mercy were afforded to those who are saved, in a way peculiar to themselves, and which is not afforded to those who perish, I believe no one soul could be saved. For I believe fallen man, universally considered *as* such, is as incapable of doing the least thing towards his salvation, till prevented by the grace of God, (as our Article speaks,) as a dead body is of restoring itself to life. Whatever difference takes place between men in this respect, is *of grace*, that is, of God, undeserved. Yea, his first approaches to our hearts are undesired too; for, till he seeks us, we cannot, we will not seek him, Psalm cx. 3. It is in the day of his power, and not before, his people are made willing. But I believe where the Gospel is preached, they who do perish, do wilfully resist the light, and choose and cleave to darkness, and stifle the convictions which the truths of God, *when his true Gospel is indeed preached*, will, in one degree or other, force upon their minds. The cares of this world, the

deceitfulness of riches, the love of other things, the violence of sinful appetites, their prejudices, pride, and self-righteousness, either prevent the reception, or choke the growth of the good seed; thus their own sin and obstinacy is the proper cause of their destruction; they *will* not come to Christ that they may have life. At the same time, it is true that they cannot, unless they are supernaturally drawn of God; John v. 40. vi. 44. They will not, and they cannot come. Both are equally true, and they are consistent. For a man's *cannot* is not a natural, but a moral inability: not an impossibility in the nature of things, as it is for me to walk upon the water, or to fly in the air; but such an inability as, instead of extenuating, does exceedingly enhance and aggravate his guilt. He is so blinded by Satan, so alienated from God by nature and wicked works, so given up to sin, so averse from that way of salvation which is contrary to his pride and natural wisdom, that he will not embrace it or seek after it; and therefore he cannot, till the grace of God powerfully enlightens his mind, and overcomes his obstacles.—But this brings me to your second query.

II. Do I think that God, in the ordinary course of his providence, grants this assistance in an irresistible manner, or effects faith and conversion without the sinner's own hearty consent and concurrence? I rather choose to term grace *invincible*, than *irresistible:* for it is too often resisted even by those who believe; but, because it is invincible, it triumphs over all resistance, when he is pleased to bestow it. For the rest, I believe no sinner is converted without his own hearty will and concurrence. But he is not willing till he is made so. Why does he at all refuse? Because he is insensible of his state; because he knows not the evil of sin, the

strictness of the law, the majesty of God whom he has offended, nor the total apostasy of his heart; because he is blind to eternity, and ignorant of the excellency of Christ; because he is comparatively whole, and sees not his need of this great Physician; because he relies upon his own wisdom, power, and supposed righteousness. Now in this state of things, when God comes with a purpose of mercy, he begins by convincing the person of sin, judgment, and righteousness, causes him to feel and know that he is a lost, condemned, helpless creature, and then discovers to him the necessity, sufficiency, and willingness of Christ to save them that are ready to perish, without money or price, without doings or deservings.—Then he sees faith to be very different from a rational assent, finds that nothing but the power of God can produce a well-grounded hope in the heart of a convinced sinner; therefore looks to Jesus, who is the author and finisher of faith, to enable him to believe. For this he waits in what we call the means of grace; he prays, he reads the word, he thirsts for God, as the hart pants for the water-brooks; and though perhaps for a while he is distressed with many doubts and fears, he is encouraged to wait on, because Jesus has said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out." The obstinacy of the will remains while the understanding is dark, and ceases when that is enlightened. Suppose a man walking in the dark, where there are pits and precipices of which he is not aware: *you* are sensible of his danger, and call after him: but he thinks he knows better than you, refuses your advice, and is perhaps angry with you for your importunity. He sees no danger, therefore will not be persuaded there is any; but if you go with a light, get before him, and show him plainly, that if he takes another step he falls beyond

the power of recovery,—then he will stop of his own accord, blame himself for not minding you before, and be ready to comply with your further directions. In either case, man's will acts with equal freedom; the difference of his conduct arises from conviction. Something like this is the case of our spiritual concerns. Sinners are called and warned by the word; but they are wise in their own eyes, and take but little notice till the Lord gives them light, which he is not bound to give to *any*, and therefore cannot be bound to give to *all*. They who have it, have reason to be thankful, and subscribe to the apostle's words: "By grace are ye saved, through "faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of "God."

I have not yet half done with the first sheet: shall consider the rest at leisure, but send this as a specimen of my willingness to clear my sentiments to you as far as I can. Unless it should please God to make what I offer satisfactory, I well know before-hand what objections and answers will occur to you; for these points have been often debated: and after a course of twenty-seven years, in which religion has been the chief object of my thoughts and inquiries, I am not entirely a stranger to what can be offered on either side. What I write, I write simply and in love; beseeching him, who alone can set a seal to his own truth, to guide you and bless you. This letter has been more than a week in hand; I have been called from it I suppose ten times, frequently in the middle of a period or a line. My leisure, which before was small, is now reduced almost to a nothing. But I am desirous to keep up my correspondence with you, because I feel an affectionate interest in you, and because it pleased God to put it into your heart to apply to me. You cannot think how your first

letter struck me: it was so unexpected, and seemed so improbable, that you should open your mind to me, I immediately conceived a hope that it would prove for good. Nor am I yet discouraged.

When you have leisure and inclination, write; I shall always be glad to hear from you, and I will proceed in answering what I have already by me, as fast as I can. But I have many letters now waiting for answers, which must be attended to.

I recommend you to the blessing and care of the great Shepherd; and remain, &c.

LETTER VIII.

My Dear Friend, December 8, 1775.

ARE you willing I should still call you so, or are you quite weary of me? Your silence makes me suspect the latter. However, it is my part to fulfil my promise, and then leave the event to God. As I have but an imperfect remembrance of what I have already written, I may be liable to some repetitions. I cannot stay to comment upon every line in your letter, but I proceed to notice such passages as seem most to affect the subject in debate. When you speak of the Scripture's maintaining one consistent sense, which, if the word of God, it certainly must do, you say you read and understand it in this one consistent sense; nay, you cannot remember the time when you did not. It is otherwise with me, and with multitudes; we remember when it was a sealed book, and we are sure it would have been so still, had not the Holy Spirit opened our understandings. But when you add, "Though I pretend not to un-
"derstand the whole, yet what I do understand appears

"perfectly consistent;" I know not how far this exception may extend, for perhaps the reason why you allow you do not understand some parts, is because you cannot make them consistent with the sense you put upon other parts. You quote my words, "That when we are "conscious of our depravity, reasoning stands us in no "stead." Undoubtedly reason always will stand rational creatures in some stead; but my meaning is, that when we are deeply convinced of sin, all our former reasonings upon the ways of God, while we made *our* conceptions the standard by which we judge what is befitting him to do, as if he were altogether such an one as ourselves—all those cobweb reasonings are swept away, and we submit to his αυτος εφη without *reasoning*, though not without *reason*. For we have the strongest reason imaginable to acknowledge ourselves vile and lost, without righteousness and strength, when we actually feel ourselves to be so.—You speak of the Gospel terms of justification.—This term is *faith*, Mark xvi. 16. Acts. xiii. 39. The Gospel propounds, admits, no other term. But this *faith*, as I endeavoured to show in my former letter, is very different from rational assent. You speak likewise of the law of *faith*; by which, if you mean what some call the remedial law, which we are to obey as well as we can, and such obedience, together with our faith, will entitle us to acceptance with God, I am persuaded the Scripture speaks of no such thing. Grace and works of any kind, in the point of acceptance with God, are mentioned by the apostle not only as opposites or contraries, but as absolutely contradictory to each other, like fire and water, light and darkness; so that the affirmation of one is the denial of the other; Rom. iv. 5. and xi. 6. God justifies freely, justifies the ungodly, and him that worketh

not. Though justifying faith be indeed an active principle, it worketh by *love*, yet not for acceptance. Those whom the apostle exhorts " to work out their own sal- " vation with *fear* and *trembling*," he considers as justified already; for he considers them as believers, in whom he supposed God had already begun a good work; and if so, was confident he would accomplish it; Phil. i. 6. To them, the consideration, that God, (who dwells in the hearts of believers,) wrought in them to will and to do, was a powerful motive and encouragement to them to work; that is, to give all diligence in his appointed means; as a right sense of the sin that dwelleth in us, and the snares and temptations around us, will teach us still to work with fear and trembling. You suppose a difference between Christians, (so called,) who are devoted to God in baptism, and those who in the first ages were converted from abominable superstitions and idolatrous vices.—It is true, in Christian countries we do not worship Heathen divinities *eo nomine*. And this is the principal difference I can find. Neither reason nor observation will allow me to think, that human nature is a whit better now than it was in the apostle's time. I know no kinds or degrees of wickedness which prevailed among Heathens, which are not prevalent among nominal Christians, who have perhaps been baptized in their infancy; and therefore, as the streams in the life are equally worldly, sensual, devilish, I doubt not but the fountain in the heart is equally polluted and poisonous; and that it is as true, as in the days of Christ and his apostles, that unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. You sent me a sermon upon the new birth, or regeneration, and you have several of mine on the same subject. I wish you to compare them with each other,

and with the Scripture; and I pray God to show you wherein the difference consists, and on which side the truth lies.

When you desire me to reconcile God's being the author of sin with his justice, you show that you misunderstand the whole strain of my sentiments; for I am persuaded you would not misrepresent them. It is easy to charge harsh consequences, which I neither allow, nor indeed do they follow from my sentiments. God cannot be the author of sin in that sense you would fix upon me; but is it possible that upon your plan you find no difficulty in what the Scripture teaches us upon this subject? I conceive, that those who were concerned in the death of Christ were very great sinners; and that in nailing him to the cross they committed atrocious wickedness. Yet, if the apostle may be believed, all this was according to the determinate council and fore-knowledge of God, Acts ii. 23.; and they did no more than what his hand and purpose had determined should be done, chap. iv. 28. And you will observe, that this wicked act, (wicked with respect to the perpetrators,) was not only permitted, but fore-ordained in the strongest and most absolute sense of the word. The glory of God and the salvation of men depended upon its being done, and just in that manner, and with all those circumstances which actually took place; and yet Judas and the rest acted freely, and the wickedness was properly their own. Now, my friend, the arguments which satisfy you, that the Scripture does not represent God as the author of this sin in this appointment, will plead for me at the same time; and when you think you easily overcome me by asking, "Can God be the author of sin?" your imputation falls as directly upon the word of God himself. God is no more the author of sin, than

the sun is the cause of ice; but it is in the nature of water to congeal into ice when the sun's influence is suspended to a certain degree. So there is sin enough in the hearts of men to make the earth the very image of hell, and to prove that men are no better than incarnate devils, were he to suspend his influence and restraint. Sometimes, and in some instances, he is pleased to suspend it considerably; and so far as *he* does, human nature quickly appears in its true colours. Objections of this kind have been repeated and refuted before either you or I were born; and the apostle evidently supposes they would be urged against his doctrine, when he obviates the question, "Why doth he yet find fault? who "hath resisted his will?" To which he gives no other answer than by referring it to God's sovereignty, and the power which a potter has over the clay. I think I have in a former letter made some reply to the charge of positiveness in my own opinion. I acknowledge that I am fallible; yet I must again lay claim to a certainty about the way of salvation. I am as sure of some things as of my own existence: I should be so if there was no human creature upon earth but myself. However, my sentiments are confirmed by the suffrages of thousands who have lived before me, of many with whom I have personally conversed in different places and circumstances, unknown to each other; yet all have received the same views, because taught by the same Spirit. And I have likewise been greatly confirmed by the testimony of many with whom I have conversed in their dying hours. I have seen them rejoicing in the prospect of death, free from fears, breathing the air of immortality; heartily disclaiming their duties and performances; acknowledging that their best actions were attended with evil sufficient to condemn them; renouncing every shadow of hope,

but what they derived from the blood of Christ, as the sole cause of their acceptance; yet triumphing in him over every enemy and fear, and as sure of heaven as if they were already there. And such were the apostle's hopes, wholly founded on knowing whom he had believed, and his persuasion of his ability to keep that which he had committed unto him. This is faith, a renouncing of every thing we are apt to call our own, and relying wholly upon the blood, righteousness, and intercession of Jesus. However, I cannot communicate this my certainty to you; I only tell you there is such a thing, in hopes, if you do not think I wilfully lie both to God and man, you will be earnest to seek it from him who bestowed it on me, and who will bestow it upon all who will sincerely apply to him, and patiently wait upon him for it.

I cannot but wonder, that while you profess to believe the depravity of human nature, you should speak of good qualities inherent in it. The word of God describes it as *evil, only evil,* and that *continually.* That there are such qualities as Stoics and infidels call virtue, I allow. God has not left man destitute of such dispositions as are necessary to the peace of society; but I deny there is any moral goodness in them, unless they are founded in a supreme love to God, have his glory for their aim, and are produced by faith in Jesus Christ. A man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, in zeal for the truth, and yet be a mere nothing, a tinkling symbal, in the sight of him who seeth not as man seeth, but judgeth the heart. Many infidels and avowed enemies to the grace and Gospel of Christ, have made a fair show of what the world call virtue; but Christian *virtue* is *grace,* the effect of a new nature and new life; and works thus wrought in God

are as different from the faint, partial imitations of them which fallen nature is capable of producing, as a living man is from a statue. A statue may express the features and lineaments of the person whom it represents, but there is no life.

Your comment on the seventh to the Romans, latter part, contradicts my feelings. You are either of a different make and nature from me, or else you are not rightly apprised of your own state, if you do not find the apostle's complaints very suitable to yourself. I believe it applicable to the most holy Christian upon earth. But controversies of this kind are worn thread-bare. When you speak of the spiritual part of a natural man, it sounds to me like the living part of a dead man, or the seeing part of a blind man. Paul tells me, that the natural man, (whatever his spiritual part may be,) can neither receive nor discern the things of God. What the apostle speaks of himself, Rom. vii. is no more, when rightly understood, than what he affirms of all who are partakers of a spiritual life, or who are true believers, Gal. v. 17. The carnal, natural mind, is enmity against God, not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.—When you subjoin, "Till it be "set at liberty from the law of sin," you do not comment upon the text, but make an addition of your own, which the text will by no means bear. The carnal mind is enmity. An enemy may be reconciled; but enmity itself is incurable. This carnal mind, natural man, old man, flesh, for the expressions are all equivalent, and denote and include the heart of man as he is by nature, may be *crucified*, *must* be *mortified*, but cannot be *sanctified*. *All* that is *good* or *gracious*, is the effect of a *new creation*, a *supernatural principle*, wrought in the heart by the Gospel of Christ, and the agency of his

Spirit; and till that is effected, the το ὑψηλον, the highest attainment, the finest qualifications in man, however they may exalt him in his own eyes, or recommend him to the notice of his fellow worms, are but abomination in the sight of God; Luke xvi. 15. The gospel is calculated and designed to stain the pride of human glory. It is provided, not for the wise and the righteous, for those who think they have good dispositions and good works to plead, but for the guilty, the helpless, the wretched; for those who are ready to perish: it fills the hungry with good things, but it sends the rich empty away. See Rev. iii. 17, 18.

You ask, If man can do nothing without an extraordinary impulse from on high, is he to sit still and careless? By no means.—I am far from saying man can do nothing, though I believe he cannot open his own eyes, or give himself faith—I wish every man to abstain carefully from sinful company, and sinful actions, to read the Bible, to pray to God for his heavenly teaching. For this waiting upon God he has a moral ability; and if he persevere thus in seeking, the promise is sure, that he shall not seek in vain. But I would not have him mistake the means for the end; think himself good because he is preserved from gross vices and follies, or trust to his religious course of duties for acceptance, nor be satisfied till Christ be revealed in him, formed within him, dwell in his heart by faith, and till he can say upon good grounds, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." I need not tell you these are Scriptural expressions; I am persuaded, if they were not, they would be exploded by many as unintelligible jargon. True faith, my dear Sir, unites the soul to Christ, and thereby gives access to God, and fills it with a peace passing understanding,

a hope, a joy unspeakable and full of glory; teaches us that we are weak in ourselves, but enables us to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. To those who thus believe, Christ is precious, their beloved; they hear and know his voice; the very sound of his name gladdens their hearts; and *he manifests himself* to *them* as *he does not* to *the world.* Thus the Scriptures speak, thus the first Christians experienced; and this is precisely the language which in our days is despised as enthusiasm and folly. For it is now as it was then, though *these things* are *revealed* to *babes,* and they are as sure of them as that they see the noonday sun, they are hidden from the wise and prudent, till the Lord makes them willing to renounce their own wisdom, and to become fools, that they may be truly wise, 1 Cor. i. 18, 19. iii. 8. viii. 2. Attention to the education of children is an undoubted duty; and it is a mercy when it so far succeeds as to preserve them from gross wickedness; but it will not change the heart. They who receive Christ are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God; John i. 13.

If a man professes to love the Lord Jesus, I am willing to believe him, if he does not give me proof to the contrary; but I am sure, at the same time, no one can love him in the Scriptural sense, who does not know the need and the worth of a Saviour; in other words, who is not brought, as a ruined, helpless sinner, to live upon him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. They who love him thus will speak highly of him, and acknowledge that he is their all in all. And they who thus love him, and speak of him, will get little thanks for their pains in such a world as this:—"All "that live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecu-

"tion; the world that hated him, will hate them." And though it is possible by his grace to put to silence, in some measure, the ignorance of foolish men; and though his providence can protect his people, so that not a hair of their heads can be hurt without his permission, yet the world will *show their teeth*, if they are not *suffered* to *bite*. The apostles were accounted babblers, ὡς περικαθαρματα του κοσμου, και παντων περιψημα. I need not point out to you the force of these expressions. We are no better than the apostles; nor have we reason to expect much better treatment, so far as we walk in their steps. On the other hand, there is a sober, decent way of speaking of God, and goodness, and benevolence, and sobriety, which the world will bear well enough; nay, we may say a little about Jesus Christ, as ready to make up the deficiencies of our honest and good endeavours, and this will not displease them. But if we preach him as the only foundation; lay open the horrid evils of the human heart; tell our hearers that they are dead in trespasses and sins, and have no better ground of hope in themselves than the vilest malefactors, in order to exalt the glory of Jesus, as saving those who are saved wholly and freely for his own name's sake; if we tell the *virtuous* and *decent*, as well as the *profligate*, that unless they are *born again*, and made *partakers* of *living faith*, and *count all things loss* for *the excellency of the knowledge of Christ*, they cannot be saved; this the world cannot bear. We shall be called knaves or fools, uncharitable bigots, and twenty hard names. If you have met with nothing like this, I wish it may lead you to suspect whether you have yet received the right key to the doctrines of Christ; for, depend upon it, the offence of the cross is not ceased.

I am grieved and surprised, that you seem to take

little notice of any thing in the account of my deceased friend, but his wishing himself to be a Deist, and his having play books about him in his illness. As to the plays, they were Shakspeare's, which, as a man of taste, it is no great wonder he should sometimes look in. Your remark on the other point shows, that you are not much acquainted with the exercises of the human mind under certain circumstances. I believe I observed formerly, that it was not a libertine wish. Had you known him, you would have known one of the most amiable and unblemished characters. Few were more beloved and admired for an uniform course of integrity, moderation, and benevolence; but he was discouraged. He studied the Bible, believed it in general to be the word of God; but his wisdom, his strong turn for reasoning, stood so in his way, that he could get no solid comfort from it. He felt the vanity of the schemes proposed by many men admired in the world as teachers of divinity; and he felt the vanity likewise of his own. He was also a minister, and had a sincere design of doing good. He wished to reform the profligate, and comfort the afflicted, by his preaching; but as he was not acquainted with that one kind of preaching which God owns to the edification of the hearers, he found he could do neither. A sense of disappointments of this kind, distressed him. Finding in himself none of that peace which the Scripture speaks of, and none of the influence he hoped for attending his ministry, he was led sometimes to question the truth of the Scripture. We have a spiritual enemy always near, to press upon a mind in this desponding situation: nor am I surprised that he should then wish himself a Deist; since, if there were any hope for a sinner, but by faith in the blood of Jesus, he had as much of his own goodness to depend upon as most I

have known. As for the rest, if you could see nothing admirable and wonderful in the clearness, the dignity, the spirituality of his expressions, after the Lord revealed the gospel to him, I can only say, I am sorry for it. This I know, that some persons of sense, taste, learning, and reason, and far enough from *my sentiments*, have been greatly struck with them. You say, a deathbed repentance is what you would be sorry to give any hope of. My dear friend, it is well for poor sinners that God's thoughts and ways are as much above men's, as the heavens are higher than the earth. We agreed to communicate our sentiments freely, and promised not to be offended with each others freedom, if we could help it. I am afraid of offending you by a thought just now upon my mind, and yet I dare not in conscience suppress it: I must therefore venture to say, that I hope they who depend upon such a repentance as your scheme points out, will repent of their repentance itself upon their deathbed at least, if not sooner. You and I, perhaps, should have encouraged the fair spoken young man, who said he had kept all the commandments from his youth, and rather have left the thief upon the cross to perish like a villain, as he lived. But Jesus thought differently. I do not encourage sinners to defer their repentance to their deathbeds—I press the necessity of a repentance this moment. But then I take care to tell them, that repentance is the gift of God; that Jesus is exalted to bestow it; and that all their endeavours that way, unless they seek to him for grace, will be vain as washing a Blackmoor, and transient as washing a swine, which will soon return to the mire again. I know the evil heart will abuse the grace of God; the apostle knew this likewise, Rom. iii. 8. and vi. 3. But this did not tempt him to suppress the glorious grace of

the Gospel, the power of Jesus to save to the uttermost, and his merciful promise, that whosoever cometh unto him, he will in nowise cast out. The repentance of a natural heart, proceeding wholly from fear, like that of some malefactors, who are sorry, not that they have committed robbery or murder, but that they must be hanged for it: this, undoubtedly, is nothing worth, whether in time of health, or in a dying hour. But that μετανοια, that gracious change of heart, views, and dispositions, which always takes place when Jesus is made known to the soul as having died that the sinner might live, and been wounded that he might be healed; this, at whatever period God is pleased to afford and effect it by his Spirit, brings a sure and everlasting salvation with it.

Still I find I have not done: you ask my exposition of the parables of the talents and pounds; but at present I can write no more. I have only just time to tell you, that when I begged your acceptance of Omicron, nothing was further from my expectation than a correspondence with you. The frank and kind manner in which you wrote, presently won upon my heart. In the course of our letters upon Subscription, I observed an integrity and disinterestedness in you, which endeared you to me still more. Since that our debates have taken a much more interesting turn; I have considered it as a call, and an opportunity put in my hand, by the especial providence of Him who ruleth over all. I have embraced the occasion to lay before you simply, and rather in a way of testimony than argumentation, what, (in the main,) I am sure is truth. I have done enough to discharge my conscience, but shall never think I do enough to answer the affection I bear you. I have done enough likewise to make you weary of my

correspondence, unless it should please God to fix the subject deeply upon your mind, and make you attentive to the possibility and vast importance of a mistake in matters of everlasting concernment. I pray that the good Spirit of God may guide you into all truths. He only is the effectual teacher. I still retain a cheerful hope, that some things you cannot at present receive, will be hereafter the joy and comfort of your heart; but I know it cannot be till the Lord's own time. I cannot promise to give such long answers as your letters require, to clear up every text that may be proposed, and to answer every objection that may be started; yet I shall be glad to change a letter now and then. At present it remains with you, whether our correspondence continues or not, as this is the third letter I have written since I heard from you, and therefore must be the last till I do. I should think what remains might be better settled *viva voce;* for which purpose I shall be glad to see you, or ready to wait on you when leisure will permit, and when I know it will be agreeable: but if, (as life and all its affairs are precarious,) we should never meet in this world, I pray God we may meet at the right hand of Jesus, in the great day, when he shall come to gather up his jewels, and to judge the world. There is an endless diversity of opinions in matters of religion; which of them are right and safe, and will lead to eternal glory, *Dies iste indicabit.* I am still in a manner lost amidst more engagements than I have time to comply with; but I feel and know that I am, &c.

ELEVEN LETTERS

TO

MR. B****, &c.

LETTER I.

My Dearest Sir, September 28, 1774.

I SEE the necessity of having, if possible, my principles at my finger's ends, that I may apply them as occasions arise every hour. Certainly, if my ability was equal to my inclination, I would remove your tumour with a word or a touch; I would exempt you instantly and constantly from every inconvenience and pain: but you are in the hands of one who could do all this and more, and who loves you infinitely better than I can do, and yet he is pleased to permit you to suffer. What is the plain inference? Certainly, that at the present juncture, he to whom all the concatenations and consequences of events are present in one view, sees it better for you to have this tumour than to be without it; for I have no more idea of a tumour rising, (or any other incidental trial befalling you,) without a cause, without a need-be, without a designed advantage to result from it, than I have of a mountain or a pyramid rising up of its own accord in the middle of Salisbury Plain. The promise is express, and literally true, that all things, universally and without exception, shall work together for good to them that love God. But they work *together:* the smallest as well as the greatest

events have their place and use, like several stones in the arch of a bridge, where no one would singly be useful, but every one in its place is necessary to the structure and support of the arch; or, rather, like the movement of a watch, where, though there is an evident subordination of parts, and some pieces have a greater comparative importance than others, yet the smallest pieces have their place and use, and are so far equally important, that the whole design of the machine would be obstructed for want of them. Some dispensations and turns of Divine providence may be compared to the main spring or capital wheels, which have a more visible, sensible, and determining influence upon the whole tenour of our lives: but the more ordinary occurrences of every day are at least pins and pivots, adjusted, timed, and suited with equal accuracy, by the hand of the same great Artist who planned and executes the whole; and we are sometimes surprised to see how much more depends and turns upon them than we were aware of. Then we admire his skill, and say he has done all things well. Indeed, with respect to his works of providence, as well as of creation, he well deserves the title of—*Maximus in minimis.* Such thoughts as these, when I am enabled to realize them, in some measure reconcile me to what he allots for myself or my friends, and convince me of the propriety of that expostulation, which speaks the language of love as well as authority, "Be still, and know that I "am God." I sympathize with you in your trial, and pray and trust that your Shepherd will be your Physician; will superintend and bless the use of means; will give you in his good time health and cure, and at all times reveal unto you abundance of peace. His promises and power are necessary for our preservation

in the smoother scenes he has allotted for us, and they are likewise sufficient for the roughest. We are always equally in danger in ourselves, and always equally safe under the shadow of his wings. No storms, assaults, sieges, or pestilences, can hurt us, till we have filled up his appointed measure of service; and when our work is done, and he has ripened us for glory, it is no great matter by what means he is pleased to call us home to himself.

I have only room to present our joint and sincerest respects. The Lord bless you all.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

My Dearest Sir, October 15, 1774.

I THINK the greatness of trials is to be estimated rather by the impression they make upon our spirits, than by their outward appearance. The smallest will be too heavy for us if we are left to grapple with it in our own strength, or rather weakness; and if the Lord is pleased to put forth his power in us, he can make the heaviest light. A lively impression of his love, or of his sufferings for us, or of the glories within the vail, accompanied with a due sense of the misery from which we are redeemed; these thoughts will enable us to be not only submissive, but even joyful, in tribulations. When faith is in exercise, though the flesh will have its feelings, the spirit will triumph over them. But it is needful we should know that we have no sufficiency in ourselves, and in order to know it we must feel it; and therefore the Lord sometimes withdraws his sen-

sible influence, and then the buzzing of a fly will be an overmatch for our patience: at other times he will show us what he can do in us and for us; then we can adopt the apostle's words, and say, I can do and suffer all things through Christ strengthening me. He has said, My grace is sufficient for thee. It is observable, that the children of God seldom disappoint our expectations under great trials; if they show a wrongness of spirit, it is usually in such little incidents that we are ready to wonder at them. For which, two reasons may be principally assigned. When great trials are in view, we run simply and immediately to our all-sufficient Friend, feel our dependence, and cry in good earnest for help; but if the occasion seems small, we are too apt secretly to lean to our own wisdom and strength, as if in such slight matters we could make shift without him. Therefore in these we often fail. Again, the Lord deals with us as we sometimes see mothers with their children. When a child begins to walk, he is often very self-important: he thinks he needs no help, and can hardly bear to be supported by the finger of another. Now in such a case, if there is no danger of harm from a fall, as if he is on a plain carpet, the mother will let him alone to try how he *can* walk. He is pleased at first, but presently down he comes; and a few experiments of this kind convince him he is not so strong and able as he thought, and make him willing to be led. But was he upon the brink of a river or a precipice, from whence a fall might be fatal, the tender mother would not trust him to himself; no, not for a moment. I have not room to make the application, nor is it needful. It requires the same grace to bear with a right spirit a cross word, as a cross in-

jury; or the breaking of a china-plate, as the death of an only son.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

My Dear Sir, November 23, 1774.

I HOPE to be informed in due time, that the Lord has given you full health and cure. He has preserved me hitherto from the hands of surgeons; but I feel as if my flesh would prove, as you say, a very coward, were it needful to submit to a painful operation. Yet I observe, when such operations are necessary, if people are satisfied of a surgeon's skill and prudence, they will not only yield to be cut at his pleasure, without pretending to direct him where, or how long, he shall make the incision, but will thank and pay him for putting them to pain, because they believe it for their advantage. I wish I could be more like them in my concerns. My body, as I said, is, through mercy, free from considerable ailments, but I have a soul that requires surgeon's work continually: there is some tumour to be discussed or laid open, some dislocation to be reduced, some fracture to be healed almost daily. It is my great mercy, that One who is infallible in skill, who exercises incessant care and boundless compassion towards all his patients, has undertaken my case; and complicated as it is, I dare not doubt his making a perfect cure. Yet, alas! I too often discover such impatience, distrust, and complaining, when under his hand; am so apt to find fault with the *instruments* he is pleased to make use of, so ready to think the salutary wounds he makes unnecessary, or too large; in a

word, I show such a promptness to control, were I able, or to direct his operations, that, were not his patience beyond expression, he would before now have given me up. I am persuaded, no money would induce Mr. **** to attend upon a patient who should act towards him as I have towards my best Physician. Sometimes I indulge a hope that I am growing wiser, and think surely, after such innumerable proofs as I have had, that he does all things well, I shall now be satisfied to leave myself, quietly and without reserve, to his disposal. A thousand such surrenders I have made, and a thousand times I have interpretatively retracted them. Yet still he is gracious. O, how shall I praise him at last!

I thank you for your letter; I never receive one from you without pleasure, and, I believe, seldom without profit, at least for the time. I believe, with you, that there is much of the proper and designed efficacy of the Gospel mystery which I have not yet experienced: and I suppose they who are advanced far beyond me in the divine life, judge the same of their utmost present attainments. Yet I have no idea of any *permanent* state in this life, that shall make my experience cease to be a state of warfare and humiliation. At my first setting out, indeed, I thought to be better, and to feel myself better, from year to year; I expected by degrees to attain every thing which I *then* comprised *in my idea* of a saint. I thought my grain of grace, by much diligence and careful improvement, would, in time, amount to a pound; that pound, in a further space of time, to a talent; and then I hoped to increase from one talent to many: so that, supposing the Lord should spare me a competent number of years, I pleased myself with the thought of dying rich.—But, alas! these my golden

expectations have been like South-Sea dreams: I have lived hitherto a poor sinner, and I believe I shall die one. Have I then gained nothing by waiting upon the Lord? Yes, I have gained that, which I once would rather have been without, such accumulated proofs of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of my heart, as I hope, by the Lord's blessing, has in some measure, taught me to know what I mean, when I say, Behold, I am vile! And in connexion with this, I have gained such experience of the wisdom, power, and compassion of my Redeemer, the need, the worth, of his blood, righteousness, attention, and intercession—the glory that he displays in pardoning iniquity and sin, and passing by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage, that my soul cannot but cry out, Who is a God like unto thee! Thus, if I have any meaner thoughts of myself, Ezek. xvi. 63. and any higher thoughts of him than I had twenty years ago, I have reason to be thankful; every grain of this experience is worth mountains of gold. And if, by his mercy, I shall yet sink more in my own esteem, and he will be pleased to rise still more glorious to my eyes, and more precious to my heart, I expect it will be much in the same way. I was ashamed when I began to seek him, I am more ashamed now; and I expect to be most of all ashamed when he shall appear to destroy my last enemy. But, O! I may rejoice in him, to think that he will not be ashamed of me.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

My Dear Sir, May 19, 1775.

I HOPE you will find the Lord present at all times, and in all places. When it is so, we are at home every where; when it is otherwise, *home* is a prison, and *abroad* a wilderness. I know what I ought to desire, and what I do desire. I point him out to others as the all in all; I esteem him as such in my own judgment; but, alas! my experience abounds with complaints. He is my sun; but clouds, and sometimes walls, intercept him from my view. He is my strength; yet I am prone to lean upon reeds. He is my friend; but on my part there is such coldness and ingratitude as no other friend could bear. But still he is gracious, and shames me with repeated multiplied goodness. O for a warmer heart, a more simple dependence, a more active zeal, a more sensible deliverance from the effects of this body of sin and death! He helps me in my endeavours to keep the vineyards of others; but, alas! my own does not seem to flourish as some do around me. However, though I cannot say I labour more abundantly than they all, I have reason to say with thankfulness, by the grace of God, I am what I am. My poor story would soon be much worse, did not he support, restrain, and watch over me every minute. Let me entreat your praises and prayers, on the behalf of me and mine; and may the Lord bless you and yours with an increase in every good.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

My Dear Sir, September 2, 1776.

THE young woman I spoke of is still living, and not much weaker than when I left her. The Lord was pleased to relieve her on Tuesday evening, and she was comfortable the remainder of the week. But yesterday her conflicts returned, and she was in great distress. The enemy, who always fights against the peace of the Lord's children, finds great advantage against them when their spirits are weakened and worn down by long illness, and is often permitted to assault them. The reasons are hidden from us, but they are doubtless worthy of his wisdom and love, and they terminate in victory, to the praise of his glorious grace, which is more signally manifested by his leading them safely through fire and water, than if their path was always smooth. He is sovereign in his dispensations, and appoints some of his people to trials and exercises, to which others, perhaps, are strangers all their days. Believers are soldiers; all soldiers by their profession are engaged to fight, if called upon; but who shall be called to sustain the hottest service, and be most frequently exposed upon the field of battle, depends upon the will of the general or king. Some of our soldiers are now upon hard service in America, while others are stationed round the palace, see the king's face daily, and have no dangers or hardships to encounter. These, however, are as liable to a call as the others; but, if not called upon, they may enjoy with thankfulness the more easy post assigned them. Thus, the Captain of our salvation allots to his soldiers such sta-

tions as he thinks proper. He has a right to employ whom he will, and where he will. Some are comparatively at ease; they are not exposed to the fiercest onsets, but live near his presence: others are, to appearance, pressed above measure, beyond strength, so that they despair even of life; yet they are supported, and in the end made more than conquerors through him who hath loved them. Long observation convinces me that the temptations which some endure, are not chastisements brought upon them by unfaithfulness, or for any thing remarkably wrong in their spirit or walk; I often rather consider that in *his* warfare, as in worldly wars, the post of danger and difficulty is the post of honour, and as such, assigned to those whom he has favoured with a peculiar measure of his grace. This young woman, in particular, was always from her first awakening remarkably humble and spiritual, and possessed of a broken and contrite spirit. I never saw her in a wrong spirit, or heard her speak an unadvised word. Yet I believe it is impossible to express the agonies she has endured. The effect of them is visible. Her animal frame was unable to sustain the burden. I believe they were the immediate cause of that illness which is now bringing her down to the grave. I doubt not but these cases depend in a great measure upon constitution; but then the temperament of our bodies depends upon his pleasure; for if the very hairs of our head are numbered, it is impossible that those circumstances of our frame, which, by the the near connexion between body and soul, have a powerful influence upon the state of our minds, can escape his notice. He could cure such bodily disorders as affect the peace of his people in a moment; yet he does not, though he loves them. There must be, therefore, wise

reasons why he does not; and though we know them not now, we shall know them hereafter. Possibly some suffer for the instruction of the rest, that we may learn to be more thankful to him for the peace we enjoy, and to be more humbly dependent upon him for the continuance of it. The Lord's way is in the deep, and his path in the great waters, untraceable by our feeble reasonings; but faith brings in a good report. We need not doubt but he does all things well, and in due time we shall see it. In the mean while he checks our vain inquiries, and calls upon us to be still, and know that he is God.

I brought home with me a thankful sense of the kindness and friendship I am favoured with from you and all yours. I account this connexion one of the great comforts of my life; and I hope it has been, and will be, not only pleasant but profitable to me. Though I am but an unapt scholar, I hope I am not unwilling to learn; and the Lord, in his merciful providence, appoints me many teachers. There is little praise due to us, if we either communicate or receive benefit in our intercourse with our fellow-disciples. In both we are but instruments under the influence of a higher hand. Were Christians to meet together without their Lord, they would either trifle or quarrel their time away. But as he has said, Where two or three are met, there am I in the midst of them, we may well be glad of opportunities of coming together. And though, for my own part, I am so poor an improver of such seasons, that the recollection of them, when past, is generally accompanied with shame and regret; yet he is gracious and merciful, and seldom leaves me to complain that they were wholly in vain.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

My Dear Sir, July 22, 1777.

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The complaints you make of what passes *within*, encourage me under what I feel myself. Indeed, if those who, I have reason to believe, are more spiritual and humble than I am, did not give some testimony that they find their hearts made of the same materials as mine is, I should be sometimes hard put to it to believe that I have any part or lot in the matter, or any real knowledge of the life of faith. But this concurrent testimony of many witnesses, confirms me in what I think the Scripture plainly teaches, that the soil of human nature, though many spots are certainly better weeded, planted, and manured than others, is every where the same, universally bad; so bad that it cannot be worse, and of itself is only capable of producing noxious weeds, and nourishing venomous creatures. We often see the effects of culture, skill, and expense, will make a garden where all was desert before. When Jesus, the good husbandman, encloses a soil, and separates it from the waste of the world, to make it a residence for himself, a change presently takes place; it is planted and watered from above, and visited with beams infinitely more cheering and fertilizing than those of the material sun. But its natural propensity to bring forth weeds still continues, and one half of his dispensations may be compared to a company of weeders, whom he sends forth intō his garden to pluck up all which he has not planted with his own hand, and

which, if left to grow, would quickly overpower and overtop the rest. But, alas! the ground is so impregnated with evil seeds, and they shoot in such quick succession, that if this weeding work were not constantly repeated, all former labour would be lost. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ.* Hence arises the necessity of daily crosses and disappointments, daily changes of frame, and such multiplied convictions that we are nothing, and can do nothing, of ourselves; all are needful and barely sufficient to prevent our hearts from being over-run with pride, self-dependence, and security.

Yours, &c.

LETTER VII.

My Dear Sir, November 6, 1777.

YOU say you are more disposed to cry *miserere* than *hallelujah.* Why not both together? When the treble is praise, and heart-humiliation for the base, the melody is pleasant, and the harmony good. However, if not both together, we must have them alternately: not all singing, not all sighing, but an interchange and balance, that we may be neither lifted too high, nor cast down too low, which would be the case if we were very comfortable or very sorrowful for a long continuance. But though we change, the Saviour changes not. All our concerns are in his hands, and therefore safe. His path is in the deep waters, his thoughts and methods of conduct are as high above ours, as the heavens are high above the earth; and he often takes a course for accomplishing his purposes directly contrary to what our narrow views would prescribe. He wounds in

order to heal, kills that he may make alive, casts down when he designs to raise, brings a death upon our feelings, wishes, and prospects, when he is about to give us the desire of our hearts. These things he does to *prove* us; but he himself knows, and has determined before-hand, what he will do. The proof indeed usually turns out to our shame. Impatience and unbelief show their heads, and prompt us to suppose this and the other thing; yea, perhaps, all things are against us, to question whether he be with us and for us, or not. But it issues likewise in the praise of his goodness, when we find that, maugre all our unkind complaints and suspicions, he is still working wonderfully for us, causing light to shine out of darkness, and doing us good in defiance of ourselves.

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

*To Mr. B****, Jun.*

Dear Sir, August 24, 1774.

THE lowness of your voice, and a blameable absence of mind on my part, prevented me from understanding what you said when you took your leave of me; nor did I just at that instant recollect that you were so soon going away. I could not otherwise have parted with you, without a particular expression of my warmest wishes for your welfare, and commending you, with an emotion which my heart always feels for you, to our God, and the word of his grace. Permit me, therefore, by writing, to assure you, so far as I can

answer for myself, that the request you were pleased to make for my remembrance, will not be forgotten by me.

You are going abroad; you will carry with you, I doubt not, the best advice, strengthened by the authority and affection of parents, whom you greatly love and greatly reverence. This may seem to make any thing a stranger can offer unnecessary, if not impertinent; yet, confiding in your candour, and in your good opinion of my intention, I shall venture to let my pen run on a little longer. Not only my wishes, but my hopes, are strong in your behalf. Perhaps there is hardly a young man in the kingdom, born to a fortune, who is setting out in life upon equal advantages with yourself. How many at your years, who have been brought up in affluence, are unprincipled, uninstructed, and have already entered upon a course of dissipation and folly, in which it is impossible they themselves can find satisfaction, and which, (unless they are reclaimed from it by an Almighty arm,) will infallibly preclude them from usefulness or esteem! whereas, your early years have been successfully employed in the pursuit of knowledge, and your education formed under the most animating and endearing influence; and the Lord has furnished you with every natural ability of body and mind, which may qualify you to serve him in that situation of life which his providence has allotted you.

What may I not then further hope from these beginnings, especially as it is easy to observe, that he has given you an amiable and promising disposition of spirit, and has not only preserved you from being hurried down the stream of a giddy world, but enabled you to account the tender restraint under which you have been educated, not a yoke, but a privilege.

I sympathize with you at what you will feel when you are first separated from your happy family. But the Lord God, who is the sun and shield of those who fear him, will be always near you! His favour is the one thing needful, which no outward advantages can compensate the want of; and the right knowledge of him is the one thing needful, which no human teaching can communicate.

Were I more intimate with you, I could have asked the question, and perhaps received the satisfaction to know, that you have already begun to consider him in this light; that you feel a vanity in science, an emptiness in creatures, and find that you have desires which only *He* who gave them can satisfy. I trust it either is, or will be thus. As to learning, though it is useful when we know how to make a right use of it, yet considered as in our own power, and to those who trust to it, without seeking a superior guidance, it is usually the source of perplexity, strife, scepticism, and infidelity. It is, indeed, like a sword in a madman's hands, which gives him the more opportunity of hurting himself and others. As to what the world calls pleasure, there is so little in it, that even the philosophers of old, or many of them, though they had little of value to substitute in its room, could despise it. You will perhaps meet with some, who will talk another language, who will pretend to be too wise to submit to the Bible, and too happy in worldly things, to expect or desire any happiness beside; but I trust you have seen enough to enable you to treat such persons with the pity, and such pretensions with the contempt, they deserve.

Should we set our concerns with an *eternal world* aside for a moment, it would be easy to demonstrate

that religion is necessary, in order to make the most of this life, and to enjoy temporal good with the highest relish. In such a world as this, where we are every moment liable to so many unforeseen and unavoidable contingencies, a man without religion may be compared to a ship in a storm, without either rudder, anchor, or pilot. But then, the religion which *only* deserves the name, must come from above; it must be suited to the state and wants of a sinner; it must be capable of comforting the heart; it must take away the sting and dread of death, and fix our confidence upon one who is always able to help us. Such is the religion of Jesus, such are its effects, and such are the criteria whereby we are to judge of the various forms and schemes under which it is proposed to us. But I forbear; I am only reminding you of what you know, and what you have known to be verified by *living* and *dying* examples. This happiness, my dear sir, is open to you, to all who seek. He is enthroned in heaven, but prayer will bring him down to the heart. Indeed he is always beforehand with us; and if we feel one desire towards him, we may accept it as a token, that he gave it us to encourage us to ask for more.

May he be your guide and guard, be with you at all times, and in all places, and bring you back to your father's house in peace. Should I live to see that day, you have few friends whose congratulations would be warmer or more sincere than mine; and if, when you are settled and at leisure, you will afford me a letter, it will be both a pleasure and a favour to, dear sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER IX.

*To Miss M. B****.*

My Dear Miss M****, November 11, 1775.

OUR last visit to **** was very pleasant to myself; if any thing that passed was of service to you, we know to whom the thanks are due; for we can neither communicate nor receive any thing, but so far as he is pleased to enable us. One reason why he often disappoints us is, that we may learn to depend on him alone. We are prone, as you observe, to rest too much upon sensible comforts, yet they are very desirable; only as to the measure and seasons, it is well to be submissive to his will, to be thankful for them when we have them, and humbly waiting for them when we have them not. They are not, however, the proper ground of our hope; a good hope springs from such a sense of our wants, and such a persuasion of his power and grace, as engages the heart to venture, upon the warrant of his promises, to trust in him for salvation. In a sense, we are often hindering him by our impatience and unbelief; but, strictly speaking, when he really begins the good work, and gives us a desire which will be satisfied with nothing short of himself, *he will not be hindered from carrying it on;* for he has said, I will work, and none shall let it. Ah! had it depended upon myself, upon my wisdom or faithfulness, I should have hindered him to purpose, and ruined myself long ago! How often have I grieved and resisted his Spirit! but hereby I have learned more of

his patience and tenderness, than I could otherwise have known. He knows our frame, and what effects our evil nature, fomented by the artifices of Satan, will have; he sees us from first to last. A thousand evils arise in our hearts, a thousand wrongnesses in our conduct, which, as they do arise, are new to ourselves, and perhaps at some times we were ready to think we were incapable of such things; but none of them are new to him, to whom past, present, and future, are the same. The foresight of them did not prevent his calling us by his grace. Though he knew we were vile, and should prove ungrateful and unfaithful, yet he would be found of us; he would knock at the door of our hearts, and gain himself an entrance. Nor shall they prevent his accomplishing his gracious purpose. It is our part to be abased before him, and quietly to hope and wait for his salvation in the use of his appointed means. The power, success, and blessing, are wholly from himself. To make us more sensible of this, he often withdraws from our perceptions: and as, in the absence of the sun, the wild beasts of the forest roam abroad; so, when Jesus hides himself, we presently perceive what is in our hearts, and what a poor shift we can make without him; when he returns, his light chases the evils away, and we are well again. However, they are not dead when most controlled by his presence.

It is your great and singular mercy, my dear miss, that he has taught you to seek him so early in life. You are entered in the way of salvation, but you must not expect all at once. The work of grace is compared to the corn, and to a building; the growth of the one, and the carrying forward of the other, are gradual. In a building, for instance, if it be large, there is much

to be done in preparing and laying the foundation, before the walls appear above ground; much is doing within, when the work does not seem perhaps to advance without; and when it is considerably forward, yet being encumbered with scaffolds and rubbish, a by-stander sees it at a great disadvantage, and can form but an imperfect judgment of it. But all this while the architect himself, even from the laying of the first stone, conceives of it according to the plan and design he has formed; he prepares and adjusts the materials, disposing each in its proper time and place, and views it, in idea, as already finished. In due season it is completed, but not in a day. The top-stone is fixed, and then the scaffolds and rubbish being removed, it appears to others as he intended it should be. Men, indeed, often plan what, for want of skill or ability, or from unforeseen disappointments, they are unable to execute. But nothing can disappoint the heavenly Builder; nor will he ever be reproached with forsaking the work of his own hands, or beginning that which he could not or would not accomplish; Phil. 1. 6. Let us therefore be thankful for beginnings, and patiently wait the event. His enemies strive to retard the work, as they did when the Jews, by his order, set about rebuilding the temple. Yet it was finished in defiance of them all.

Believe me to be, &c.

LETTER X.

My Dear Miss M****, April 29, 1776.

I THANK you for your last; and I rejoice in the Lord's goodness to you. To be drawn by love, exempted from those distressing terrors and temptations which some are beset with; to be favoured with the ordinances and means of grace, and connected with those, and with those only, who are disposed and qualified to assist and encourage you in seeking the Saviour; these are peculiar privileges, which all concur in your case: he loves you, he deals gently with you, he provides well for you, and accompanies every outward privilege with his special blessing; and I trust he will lead you on from strength to strength, and show you still greater things than you have yet seen. They whom he teaches are always increasing in knowledge, both of themselves and of him. The heart is deep, and like Ezekiel's vision, presents so many chambers of imagery, one within another, that it requires time to get a considerable acquaintance with it, and we shall never know it thoroughly. It is now more than twenty-eight years since the Lord began to open mine to my own view; and from that time to this, almost every day has discovered to me something which till then was unobserved; and the further I go, the more I seem convinced that I have entered but a little way. A person that travels in some parts of Derbyshire may easily be satisfied that the country is cavernous; but how large, how deep, how numerous the caverns may be, which are hidden from us by the surface of the ground, and what is contained in them, are questions which our nicest inquirers cannot fully answer. Thus I judge of my heart,

that it is very deep and dark, and full of evil; but as to particulars, I know not one of a thousand.

And if our own hearts are beyond our comprehension, how much more incomprehensible is the heart of Jesus! If sin abounds in us, grace and love superabound in him: his ways and thoughts are higher than ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth, his love has a height, and depth, and length, and breadth, that passeth all knowledge; and his riches of grace are unsearchable riches, Ephes. iii. 8. 18, 19. All that we have received or can receive from him, or know of him in this life, compared with what he *is* in himself, or what he *has* for us, is but as the drop of a bucket compared with the ocean, or a single ray of light in respect of the sun.—The waters of the sanctuary flow to us at first almost upon a level, ankle deep; so graciously does the Lord condescend to our weakness; but they rise as we advance, and constrain us to cry out with the apostle, O the depth! We find before us, as Dr. Watts beautifully expresses it,

> A sea of love and grace unknown,
> Without a bottom or a shore.

O the excellency of the knowledge of Christ! It will be growing upon us through time, yea, I believe through eternity. What an astonishing and what a cheering thought, that this high and lofty one should unite himself to our nature, that so, in a way worthy of his adorable perfections, he might by his Spirit unite us to himself! Could such a thought have arisen in our hearts, without the warrant of his word, (but it is a thought which no created mind was capable of conceiving till he revealed it,) it would have been presumption and blasphemy; but now he has made it known, it is the foundation of our

hope, and an inexhaustible spring of life and joy. Well may we say, Lord, what is man, that thou shouldst thus visit him!

I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

My Dear Miss M***, September 3, 1776.

WE saw no danger upon the road homeward; but my judgment tells me we are always upon the brink of danger, though we see it not; and that, without the immediate protection and care of Him who preserveth the stars in their courses, there could be no travelling safely a few miles, nor even sitting in safety by the fire-side. But with him we are safe in all places and circumstances, till our race is done, and his gracious purposes concerning us, in the present life, are completely answered;—then he will call us home, that we may see his face, and be with him for ever; and then it will not much signify what messenger he shall be pleased to send for us.

While he took care of us abroad, he watched over our concerns at home likewise; so that we found all well upon our return, and met with nothing to grieve us. Many go out and return home no more, and many find distressing things have happened in their absence; but we have to set up our Ebenezer, and to say, Hitherto he has helped us. Assist me to praise him. The Lord is leading you in the good old way, in which you may perceive the footsteps of his flock who have gone before you. They had in their day the same difficulties, fears, and complaints as we have, and through mercy we partake of the same consolation which supported and refreshed them; and the promises which they trusted and

found faithful, are equally sure to us. It is still true, that they who believe shall never be confounded. If left to ourselves, we should have built upon sand: but he has provided and revealed a sure foundation, removed our natural prejudices against it; and now, though rains, and floods, and storms, assault our building, it cannot fall, for it is founded upon a rock. The suspicions and fears which arise in an awakened mind, proceed, in a good measure, from remaining unbelief; but not wholly so, for there is a jealousy and diffidence of ourselves, a wariness, owing to a sense of the deceitfulness of our hearts, which is a grace, and a gift of the Lord. Some people who have much zeal, but are destitute of this jealous fear, may be compared to a ship that spreads a great deal of sail, but is not properly ballasted, and is therefore in danger of being overset whenever a storm comes. A sincere person has many reasons for distrusting his own judgment; is sensible of the vast importance of the case, and afraid of too hastily concluding in his own favour, and therefore not easily satisfied. However, this fear, though useful, especially to young beginners, is not comfortable; and they who simply wait upon Jesus, are gradually freed from it, in proportion as their knowledge of him, and their experience of his goodness, increases. He has a time for settling and establishing them in himself, and his time is best. We are hasty, and would be satisfied at once, but his word is, "Tarry "thou the Lord's leisure." The work of grace is not like Jonah's Gourd, which sprang up and flourished in a night, and as quickly withered; but rather like the oak, which, from a little acorn and a tender plant, advances with an almost imperceptible growth from year to year, till it becomes a broad, spreading, and deep-rooted tree, and then it stands for ages. The Christian oak shall grow

and flourish for ever. When I see any, soon after they appear to be awakened, making a speedy profession of great joy, before they have a due acquaintance with their own hearts, I am in pain for them. I am not sorry to hear them afterwards complain that their joys are gone, and they are almost at their wit's end; for without some such check, to make them feel their weakness and dependence, I seldom find them turn out well; either their fervour insensibly abates, till they become quite cold, and sink into the world again, (of which I have seen many instances,) or, if they do not give up all, their walk is uneven, and their spirit has not that savour of brokenness and true humility, which is a chief ornament of our holy profession. If they do not feel the plague of their hearts at first, they find it out afterwards, and too often manifest it to others. Therefore, though I know the Spirit of the Lord is free, and will not be confined to our rules, and there may be excepted cases; yet, in general, I believe the old proverb, "Soft and "fair goes far," will hold good in Christian experience. Let us be thankful for the beginnings of grace, and wait upon our Saviour patiently for the increase. And as we have chosen him for our physician, let us commit ourselves to his management, and not prescribe to him what he shall prescribe for us. He knows us, and he loves us better than we do ourselves, and will do all things well.

You say, "It never came with power and life to my "soul, that he died for me." If you mean, you never had any extraordinary sudden manifestation, something like a vision or a voice from heaven, confirming it to you, I can say the same. But I know he died for sinners; I know I am a sinner: I know he invites them that are ready to perish; I am such a one: I know,

upon his own invitation, I have committed myself to him; and I know, by the effects, that he has been with me hitherto, otherwise I should have been an apostate long ago; and therefore I know that he died for me; for had he been pleased to kill me, (as he justly might have done,) he would not have shown me such things as these.

> If I must perish, would the Lord
> Have taught my heart to love his word?
> Would he have given me eyes to see
> My danger and my remedy?
> Reveal'd his name, and bid me pray,
> Had he resolv'd to say me nay?

I know that I am a child, because he teaches me to say, Abba, Father. I know that I am *his*, because he has enabled me to choose him for *mine*. For such a choice and desire could never have taken place in my heart, if he had not placed it there himself. By nature I was too blind to know him, too proud to trust him, too obstinate to serve him, too base-minded to love him. The enmity I was filled with against his government, righteousness and grace, was too strong to be subdued by any power but his own. The love I bear him is but a faint and feeble spark, but it is an emanation from himself: he kindled it, and he keeps it alive; and because it is his work, I trust many waters shall not quench it.

I have only room to assure you, that I am, &c.

FOUR LETTERS

TO THE

REV. MR. R****.

LETTER I.

My Dear Sir, April 15, 1776.

* * * * * * * *

I often rejoice on your behalf. Your call out of the world was a singular, comfortable instance of the power of grace. And when I consider the difficulties and snares of your situation, and that you have been kept in the middle path, preserved from undue compliances on the one hand, and unnecessary singularities on the other, I cannot doubt but the Lord has hitherto helped and guided you. Indeed you have need of his guidance. At your years, and with your expectations in life, your health firm, and your natural spirits lively, you are exposed to many snares: yet if the Lord keeps you sensible of your danger, and dependent upon him, you will walk safely. Your security, success, and comfort, depend upon him: and, in the way of means, chiefly upon your being preserved in an humble sense of your own weakness. It is written, "Fear not, I "am with thee." It is written again, "Blessed is the "man who feareth always." There is a perfect harmony in those seemingly different texts. May the wisdom that cometh from above, teach you and me to keep them both united in our view. If the Lord be with us, we have no cause of fear. His eye is upon us, his arm

over us, his ear open to our prayer; his grace sufficient, his promise unchangeable. Under his protection, though the path of duty should lie through fire and water, we may cheerfully and confidently pursue it. On the other hand, our hearts are so deceitful, fallible, and frail; our spiritual enemies so subtle, watchful, and powerful; and they derive so many advantages from the occasions of every day, in which we are unavoidably and unexpectedly concerned; there is so much combustible within, and so many temptations arising from without, capable of setting all in a flame; that we cannot be too jealous of ourselves and our circumstances. The duke of Devonshire's motto, (if I mistake not,) well suits the Christian, *Cavendo tutus.* When we can say in the Psalmist's spirit, *Hold thou me up,* we may warrantably draw his conclusion, *and I shall be safe;* but the moment we lean to our own understanding, we are in imminent danger of falling. The enemy who wars against our souls, is a consummate master in his way, fertile in stratagems, and equally skilful in carrying on his assaults by sap or by storm. He studies us, if I may so say, all round, to discover our weak sides; and he is a very Proteus for changing his appearances, and can appear as a sly serpent, a roaring lion, or an angel of light, as best suits his purpose. It is a great mercy to be in some measure acquainted with his devices, and aware of them. They who wait humbly upon the Lord, and consult carefully at his word and throne of grace, are made wiser than their enemy, and enabled to escape and withstand his wiles. I know you will not expect me to apologize for putting you in mind of these things, though you know them. I have a double warrant; the love I bear you, and the Lord's command, Heb. iii. 13. Use the like freedom with me; I need it, and hope to

be thankful for it, and accept it as one of the best proofs of friendship.

The Lord bless and keep you. Pray for us, and believe me to be, sincerely yours.

LETTER II.

My Dear Sir, July 13, 1776.

THE Lord, who mercifully called you out of a state of thoughtless dissipation, and has hitherto been with you, will, I trust, sweeten all your trials, and cause his light to shine upon your paths. It seems probable, that if you pay a just regard to your father's negative, which I really think he has a right to expect from you, and at the same time make a steady and conscientious use of that negative which he generously allows you to put upon his proposals, to which I think you have an equal right; I say, while things remain in this situation, and you continue to think differently, it seems probable, that the hour of your exchanging a single for the marriage state, is yet at some distance. But let not this grieve you. The Lord is all-sufficient. A lively sense of his love, a deep impression of eternity, a heart filled with zeal for his cause, and a thirst for the good of souls, will, I hope, enable you to make a cheerful sacrifice of whatever has no necessary connexion with your peace and his service. And you may rest assured, that whenever he, who loves you better than you do yourself, sees it best for you upon the whole to change your condition, he will bring it about; he will point out the person, prepare the means, and secure the success, by his providence, and the power he has over every heart. And you shall see that all previous difficulties were either

gracious preventions, which he threw in the way, to prevent your taking a wrong step, or temporary bars, which, by his removing them afterwards, should give you opportunity of more clearly perceiving his care and interposition in your favour. In the mean time remember your high calling.—You are a minister and ambassador of Christ; you are intrusted with the most honourable and important employment that can engage and animate the heart of man. Ταῦτα μελετα, ἐν τουτοις ἰσθι, επιμενε αὐτοῖς*.

Filled and fired with a constraining sense of the love of Jesus, and the worth of souls, impressed with an ardour to carry war into Satan's kingdom, to storm his strong holds, and rescue his captives; you will have little leisure to think of any thing else. How does the love of glory stimulate the soldier, make him forget and forego a thousand personal tendernesses, and prompt him to cross oceans, to traverse deserts, to scale mountains, and plunge into the greatest hardships and the thickest dangers! They do it for a corruptible crown, a puff of breath, an empty fame; their highest prospect is the applause and favour of their prince. We likewise are soldiers, we have a Prince and Captain who deserves our all. They who know him, and have hearts to conceive of his excellence, and to feel their obligations to him, cannot, indeed, seek their own glory; but his glory is dearer to them than a thousand lives. They owe him their souls, for he redeemed them with blood, his own blood; and by his grace he subdued and pardoned them when they were rebels, and in arms against him. Therefore they are not their own, they would not be their own. When his standard is raised, when his enemies are in motion, when his people are to

* 1 Tim. iv. 15.

be rescued; they go forth clothed with his panoply, they fight under his eye, they are sure of his support, and he shows them the conqueror's crown. O when they think of that Ευ, δουλε αγαθε*, with which he has promised to welcome them home when the campaign is over, hard things seem easy, and bitter things sweet; they count nothing, not even their own lives dear, so that they may finish their course with joy. May the Lord make us thus minded; give us a hearty concern for *his* business, and he has engaged to take care of *ours;* and nothing that can conduce to our real comfort and usefulness shall be with-held.

Believe me to be sincerely yours.

LETTER III.

My Dear Friend, December 21, 1776.

YOUR letter brought me tidings of joy, and then furnished me with materials for a bonfire upon the occasion. It was an act of passive obedience to burn it, but I did obey. I congratulate you upon the happy issue to which the Lord has brought your affairs. I see that his good Spirit and good providence have been and are with you. I doubt not but your union with Miss **** will be a mutual blessing, and, on your part, heightened by being connected with such a family. I could enlarge upon this head, if *my* letter likewise was to be burnt as soon as you have read it. I look upon the friendship the Lord has given me there, as one of my prime privileges; and I hope I shall always be

* Well done, good servant.

thankful that it proved a means of introducing you into it.

I congratulate you likewise upon your accession to ******, not because it is a good living, in a genteel neighbourhood, and a fine country; but because I believe the Lord sends you there for fulfilling the desires he has given you, of being useful to souls. Church-preferment, in any other view, is dreadful; and I would as soon congratulate a man upon seeing a millstone tied about his neck, to sink him into the depths of the sea, as upon his obtaining what is called a good living, except I thought him determined to spend and be spent in the cause of the Gospel. A parish is an awful millstone indeed to those who see nothing valuable in the flock but the fleece: but the Lord has impressed your heart with a sense of the glory and importance of his truth, and the worth of souls; and animated your zeal by the most powerful motive, the knowledge of his constraining love. Your case is extraordinary. Perhaps, when you review in your mind the circle of your former gay acquaintance, you may say with Job's servant, "I "only am escaped alive:"—The rest are either removed into an eternal state, or are still hurrying down the stream of dissipation, and living without God in the world. Yet there was a time when there seemed no more probability on your side than on theirs, that you should obtain mercy, and be called to the honour of preaching the glorious Gospel. You are setting out with every possible advantage. In early life, with a cheerful flow of spirits, affluent circumstances, and now, to crown all, the Lord gives you the very choice of your heart in a partner; one who, besides deserving and meeting your affection, will, I am persuaded, be a real

helpmeet to you in your spiritual walk. How much is here to be thankful for!

I trust the Lord has given you, and will maintain in you, a right spirit, so as not to rest in his gifts, but to hold them in connexion with the love and favour of the giver. It is a low time with us, when the greatest assemblage of earthly blessings can seem to satisfy us without a real communion with him. His grace is sufficient for you; but undoubtedly such a scene of prosperity as seems to lie before you, is full of snares, and calls for a double effort of watchfulness and prayer.—Your situation will fix many eyes upon you, and Satan will doubtless watch you, and examine every corner of the hedge around you, to see if he can find a gap by which to enter. We have but few rich Gospel-ministers; but it is too evident that he has found a way to damp the zeal and hurt the spirits of some of those few, who for a time acted nobly, and seemed to walk out of the reach of the allurements of the world. I am not jealous of you; I feel a comfortable persuasion, that the Lord has taken a fast hold of your heart, and given you a fast hold of his almighty arm: yet I believe you will not be displeased with me for dropping a hint of this kind, and at this time.

You have heard of the trial with which the Lord has been pleased to visit us; it still continues, though considerably alleviated. It is tempered with many mercies, and I hope he disposes us in a measure to submission. I trust it will be for good. My dear friend, you are coming into my school, where you will learn, as occasions offer, to feel more in the person of another than in your own. But be not discouraged; the Lord only afflicts for our good. It is necessary that our sharpest trials should sometimes spring from our dearest com-

forts, else we should be in danger of forgetting ourselves, and setting up our rest here. In such a world, and with such hearts as we have, we shall often need something to prevent our cleaving to the dust, to quicken us to prayer, and to make us feel that our dependence for one hour's peace is upon the Lord alone. I am ready to think I have known as much of the good and happiness which this world can afford, as most people who live in it. I never saw the person with whom I wished to exchange in temporals. And for many years past I have thought my trials have been light and few, compared with what many, or most of the Lord's people have endured. And yet, though in the main possessed of my own wishes, when I look back upon the twenty-seven years past, I am ready to style them, with Jacob, "few and evil;" and to give the sum-total of their contents in Solomon's words—"all is vanity." If I take these years to pieces, I see a great part of them was filled up with sins, sorrows, and inquietudes. The pleasures, too, are gone, and have no more real existence than the baseless fabric of a dream. The shadows of the evening will soon begin to come over us; and if our lives are prolonged, a thousand pains and infirmities, from which the Lord has in a remarkable measure exempted us hitherto, will probably overtake us; and at last we must feel the parting pang. *Sic transit gloria mundi.* Sin has so envenomed the soil of this earth, that the amaranth will not grow upon it. But we are hastening to a better world, and bright unclouded skies, where our sun will go down no more, and all tears shall be wiped from our eyes.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

My Dear Friend, September 27, 1777.

MR. **** called on us on Thursday evening, and from that hour my thoughts, when awake, have seldom been absent from ———. Few people are better qualified to feel for *you*, yourself and the family excepted; perhaps there is no person living more nearly interested in what concerns Mrs. **** than myself. I could not, therefore, at such a time as this, refrain from writing; and glad should I be, if the Lord may help me to drop a suitable word, and accompany it with a blessing to you in the reading.

I am glad to be assured, (though I expected no less,) that Mrs. **** happily feels herself safe in the Lord's hand, and under the care of the good Shepherd and Saviour, to whom she has often committed herself; and finds him faithful to his promise, giving her strength in her soul according to her day, and enabling her quietly to submit to his holy, wise, and gracious will. And it is my prayer, that he may strengthen you likewise, and reveal his own all-sufficiency so clearly and powerfully to your heart, that you may not be afraid of any event, but cheerfully rely upon him, to be all that to you, in every circumstance and change, which his promise warrants you to expect.

I am willing to hope, that this is but a short season of anxiety, appointed for the exercise of your faith and patience, and to give you, in his good time, a signal proof of his power and goodness in answering prayer. He sometimes brings us into such a situation that the

help of creatures is utterly unavailing, that we may afterwards be more clearly sensible of his interposition. Then we experimentally learn the vanity of all things here below, and are brought to a more immediate and absolute dependence upon himself. We have need of having these lessons frequently inculcated upon us; but when his end is answered, how often, after he has caused grief, does he show his great compassions, and save us from our fears by an outstretched arm, and such a seasonable and almost unexpected relief, as constrains us to cry out, "What has God wrought?" and, "Who is a "God like unto thee?" Such, I hope, will be the issue of your present trial, and that he who gave her to you at first, will restore her to you again. I see you in the furnace; but the Lord is sitting by it as a refiner of silver, to moderate the fire, and manage the process, so that you shall lose nothing but dross, and be brought forth refined as gold, to praise his name. Apparent difficulties, however great, are nothing to him. If he speaks, it is done; for to God the Lord belong the issues from death. Should his pleasure be otherwise, and should he call your dear partner to a state of glory before you, still I know he is able to support you. What he does, however painful to the flesh, must be right, because he does it. Having bought us with his blood, and saved our souls from hell, he has every kind of right to dispose of us and ours as he pleases; and this we are sure of, he will not lay so much upon us as he freely endured for us; and he can make us amends for all we suffer, and for all we lose, by the light of his countenance. A few years will set all to rights; and they who love him and are beloved by him, though they may suffer as others, shall not sorrow as others:

for the Lord will be with them here, and he will soon have them with him: there all tears shall be wiped from their eyes.

Perhaps I know as well how to calculate the pain of such a separation, as any one who has not actually experienced it. Many a time the desire of my eyes has been threatened, many a time my heart has been brought low; but from what I have known at such seasons, I have reason to hope, that had it been his pleasure to bring upon me the thing that I feared, his everlasting arm would have upheld me from sinking under the stroke. As ministers, we are called to comfort the Lord's afflicted people, and to tell them the knowledge of his love is a cordial able to keep the soul alive under the sharpest trials. We must not wonder that he sometimes puts us in a way of showing that we do not deal in unfelt truths, but that we find ourselves that solid consolation in the Gospel, which we encourage others to expect from it. You have now such an occasion of glorifying the Lord; I pray he may enable you to improve it, and that all around you may see that he is with you, and that his good word is the support and anchor of your soul. Then I am sure, if it upon the whole is best for you, he will give you the desire of your heart, and you shall yet live to praise him together.

I am, &c.

A LETTER

TO THE

REV. MR. O****.

Dear Sir, April 3, 1759.

YOU see I have prevented you in your promise of writing first; and having found a pretext for troubling Mr. ———, I was willing to venture upon you without any, unless you will let me plead a desire of showing you how welcome your correspondence would be to me. I know not if my heart was ever more united to any person in so short a space of time, than to you; and what engaged me so much was the spirit of meekness and of love (that peculiar and inimitable mark of true Christianity,) which I observed in you. I mean it not to your praise. May all the praise be to him, from whom every good and perfect gift cometh, who alone maketh the best to differ from the worst: but I think I may well mention, to your encouragement, that all who conversed with you, greatly regret your speedy departure; and I am persuaded, the same temper, the same candour, will make you acceptable, honourable, and useful, wherever you go. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and the peace-makers; they shall obtain the mercy they want, and possess the peace they love. They shall inherit the earth. The earth, sinful and miserable as it is, shall be worthy to be called an inheritance to them, for they shall enjoy a comparative heaven in it. They shall

be called the children of God, though dignified with no title among men. Alas! how much are these things overlooked, even by many who, I would hope, are real believers. Methinks a very different spirit from that of the church of Laodicea, is to be seen amongst us; though perhaps it is not easy to say which is the best of the two. That was neither cold nor hot, this, *(mirabile dictu,)* is both cold and hot at once, and both to the extreme. Hot, hasty, and arbitrary, in those few things where mediocrity is a virtue; but cool and remiss in those great points, where the application of the whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, is so absolutely necessary, and so positively enjoined. Surely there is too much room for this observation, and I perhaps stand self-condemned in making it.

I hope you will take opportunity to improve your interest in Mr.**** by letter. He expressed much satisfaction in the hour he spent with you before you sailed, and a great regard for you; therefore would, I doubt not, give you a fair hearing, and the phrase *litera Scripta manet* is true in more senses than one. He makes such large concessions sometimes, that I am apt to think he is conscious of the weakness of his own argument; and then he is as soon angry with himself for complying so far, and flies off to the other extreme. Yet for the most part when he speaks plain, and is not restrained by complaisance for particular persons, he appears not only a stranger to experimental religion, but averse to the notion, and generally inclined to treat it with levity. His obstacles are very many and very great; his reputation as a learned man, his years, his regular life, and perhaps above all, his performances in print, especially his last book, are so many barriers that must be broke through before conviction can reach him. But the grace of God

can do all this and more; and indeed when I think of the many truly valuable parts of his character, and the indefatigable pains he has taken in his researches after truth, I am willing to hope, that the Lord will at length teach him the true wisdom, and enable him, (however hard it may seem,) to give up his own attainments, and sit down like a little child at the feet of Jesus.

I hope to hear soon and often from you. I number my Christian correspondents among my principal blessings; a few judicious pious friends, to whom, when I can get leisure to write, I send my heart by turns. I can trust them with my inmost sentiments, and can write with no more disguise than I think. I shall rejoice to add you to the number, if you can agree to take me as I am, (as I think you will,) and suffer me to commit my whole self to paper, without respect to names, parties, and sentiments. I endeavour to observe my Lord's commands, to call no man master upon earth; yet I desire to own and honour the image of God wherever I find it. I dare not say I have no bigotry, for I know not myself; and remember to my shame, that formerly, when I ignorantly professed myself free from it, I was indeed overrun with it; but this I can say, I allow it not; I strive and pray against it; and thus far, by the grace of God, I have attained, that I find my heart as much united to many who differ from me in some points, as to any who agree with me in all. I set no value upon any doctrinal truth, further than it has a tendency to promote practical holiness. If others should think those things hindrances which I judge to be helps in this respect, I am content they should go on in their own way, according to the light God has given them, provided they will agree with me ἐν τῷ Επάναγκες. If it should be asked, Which are the necessary things? I answer, Those in which the

spiritual worshippers of all ages and countries have been agreed; those on the contrary are mere subordinate matters, in which the best men, those who have been the most eminent for faith, prayer, humility, and nearness to God, always have been, and still are, divided in their judgments. Upon this plan, I should think it no hard matter to draw up a form of sound words, (whether dignified with the name of a creed or no, I care not,) to which true believers of all sorts and sizes would unanimously subscribe. Suppose it ran something in the following manner: I believe that sin is the most hateful thing in the world: that I and all men are by nature in a state of wrath and depravity, utterly unable to sustain the penalty, or to fulfil the commands of God's holy law; and that we have no sufficiency of ourselves to think a good thought. I believe that Jesus Christ is the chief among ten thousands; that he came into the world to save the chief of sinners, by making a propitiation for sin by his death, by paying a perfect obedience to the law in our behalf; and that he is now exalted on high, to give repentance and remission of sins to all that believe; and that he ever liveth to make intercession for us. I believe that the Holy Spirit, (the gift of God through Jesus Christ,) is the sure and only guide into all truth, and the common privilege of all believers; and under his influence, I believe the Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, and to furnish us thoroughly for every good work. I believe that love to God, and to man for God's sake, is the essence of religion, and the fulfilling of the law; that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; that those who by a patient course in well-doing, seek glory, honour, and immortality, shall receive eternal life; and I believe that this reward is not of debt but of grace, even to the

praise and glory of that grace, whereby he has made us accepted in the Beloved. Amen.

I pretend not to accuracy in this hasty draught; they are only outlines, which, if you please to retouch, and fill up at your leisure, I hope you will favour me with a sight of it. I fear I have tired you. Shall only add my prayers, that the Lord may be with you, and crown your labours of love with success, that you may hereafter shine among those who have been instrumental in turning many to righteousness.

I am, &c.

SEVEN LETTERS

TO THE

REV. MR. P****.

LETTER I.

Dear Sir,

THE account which I received by Mr. C****, and by the letter which he brought from you, of your welfare, and the welfare of your people, was very pleasing, though indeed no more than I expected. I believed, from the first of your going to S****, that you would like the people, and I believed the Lord had given you that frame of spirit which he has promised to bless. What reason have we to praise him for the knowledge of his Gospel, and for the honour of being called to preach it to others! and likewise that he has been pleased to cast your lot and mine amongst a people who value it, and to crown our poor labours with some measure of acceptance and usefulness How little did we think, in the unawakened part of our life, to what it was his good pleasure to reserve us!

The Lord is pleased, in a measure, to show me the suitableness and necessity of an humble dependent frame of heart, a ceasing from self, and a reliance upon him in the due use of appointed means; I am far from having attained, but I hope I am pressing, at least seeking after it. I wish to speak the word simply and experimentally, and to be so engaged with the importance of the subject, the worth of souls, and the thought

that I am speaking in the name and presence of the Most High God, as that I might, if possible, forget every thing else. This would be an attainment indeed! More good might be expected from a broken discourse, delivered in such a frame, than from the most advantageous display of knowledge and gifts without it. Not that I would undervalue propriety and pertinence of expression: it is our duty to study to find out acceptable words, and to endeavour to appear as workmen that need not be ashamed; but those who have most ability in this way, have need of a double guard of grace and wisdom, lest they be tempted to trust in it, or to value themselves upon it. They that trust in the Lord shall never be moved; and them that abase themselves before him, he will exalt. I am well persuaded that your conduct and views have been agreeable to these sentiments; and therefore the Lord has supported, encouraged, and owned you; and I trust he will still bless you, and make you a blessing to many. He that walketh humbly walketh surely.

Believe me to be, &c.

LETTER II.

My Dear Sir, August 14, 1770.

YOUR letter did me good when I received it, at least gave me much pleasure; and I think it has given me a lift while I have been just now reading it. I know not that I ever had those awful views of sin which you speak of; and though I believe I should be better for them, I dare not seriously wish for them. There is a petition which I have heard in public prayer, Lord show us the evil of our hearts. To this petition I can-

not venture to set my Amen, at least not without a qualification. Show me enough of thyself to balance the view, and then show me what thou pleasest. I think I have a very clear and strong conviction in my *judgment*, that I am vile and worthless, that my heart is full of evil, only evil, and that continually. I know something of it too experimentally; and therefore, judging of the whole by the sample, though I am not suitably affected with what I do see, I tremble at the thought of seeing more. A man may look with some pleasure upon the sea in a storm, provided he stands safe upon the land himself; but to be *upon* the sea in a storm, is quite another thing. And yet surely the coldness, worldliness, pride, and twenty other evils under which I groan, owe much of their strength to the want of that feeling sense of my own abominations with which you have been favoured: I say favoured, for I doubt not but the Lord gave it you in mercy, and that it has proved, and will prove a mercy to you, to make you more humble, spiritual, and dependent, as well as to increase your ability for preaching the Gospel of his grace. Upon these accounts, I can assure you, that upon a first reading, and till I stopped a moment to count the cost, I was ready to envy you all that you had felt. I often seem to know what the Scripture teaches both of sin and grace, as if I knew them not; so faint and languid are my perceptions, I often seem to think and talk of sin without any sorrow, and of grace without any joy.

I have had some people awakened by dreams, as you had by streamers; but for aught I know, we are no less instrumental to the good of these, than to any other person, upon whom when we look, our hearts are ready to exult and say, See what the Lord has done by

me. I do not think that, strictly speaking, all the streamers of the north are able to awaken a dead soul. I suppose people may be terrified by them, and made thoughtful, but awakened only by the *word.* The streamers either sent them to hear the Gospel, or roused them to attend to it; but it was the knowledge of the truth brought home to the heart, that did the business. Perhaps the streamers reminded them of what they had heard from you before. Two persons here, who lived like Heathens, and never came to church, were alarmed by some terrifying dreams, and came out to hearing forthwith. There the Lord was pleased to meet with them. One of them died triumphing; the other, I hope, will do so when her time comes. Whatever means, instruments, or occasions he is pleased to employ, the work is all his own; and I trust you and I are made willing to give him all the glory, and to sink into the dust at the thought that he should ever permit us to take his holy name upon our polluted lips.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

My Dear Sir, June 13, 1772.

YOU say that your experience agrees with mine. It must be so, because our hearts are alike. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, destitute of good, and prone to evil. This is the character of mankind universally, and those who are made partakers of grace, are renewed but in part; the evil nature still cleaves to them, and the root of sin, though mortified, is far from being dead. While the cause remains, it will have effects; and while we are burdened with the body of this death, we must groan under it. But we need

not be swallowed up with over-much sorrow, since we have in Jesus, a Saviour, a Righteousness, an Advocate, a Shepherd. "He knows our frame, and remembers "that we are but dust." If sin abounds in us, grace abounds much more in him; nor would he suffer sin to remain in his people, if he did not know how to overrule it, and make it an occasion of endearing his love and grace so much the more to their souls. The Lord forbid that we should plead his goodness as an encouragement to sloth and indifference. Humiliation, godly sorrow, and self-abasement become us; but, at the same time, we may rejoice in the Lord. Though sin remains, it shall not have dominion over us; though it wars in us, it shall not prevail against us. We have a mercy-seat sprinkled with blood, we have an advocate with the Father, we are called to this warfare, and we fight under the eye of the Captain of our salvation, who is always near to renew our strength, to heal our wounds, and to cover our heads in the heat of battle. As ministers, we preach to those who have like passions and infirmities with ourselves; and by our own feelings, fears, and changes, we learn to speak a word in season to them that are weary, to warn those who stand, and to stretch out a hand of compassion towards them that are fallen; and to commend it to others, from our own experience, as a faithful saying, "That "Jesus came to save the chief of sinners." Besides, if the Lord is pleased to give us some liberty, acceptance, and success in preaching the Gospel, we should be in great danger of running mad with spiritual pride, if the Lord did not permit us to feel the depravity and vileness of our hearts, and thereby keep us from forgetting *what we are in ourselves.*

With regard to your young people, you must expect

to meet with some disappointment. Perhaps not every one of whom you have conceived hopes will stand; and some who do belong to the Lord are permitted to make sad mistakes for their future humiliation. It is our part to watch, warn, and admonish; and we ought likewise to be concerned for those slips and miscarriages which we cannot prevent A minister, if faithful, and of a right spirit, can have no greater joy than to see his people walking honourably and steadily in the truth; and hardly any thing will give him more sensible grief, than to see any of them taken in Satan's wiles. Yet still the Gospel brings relief here. He is wiser than we are, and knows how to make those things subservient to promote his work which we ought to guard against as evils and hindrances. We are to use the means: he is to rule the whole. If the faults of some are made warnings to others, and prove in the end occasions of illustrating the riches of divine grace, this should reconcile us to what we cannot help, though such considerations should not slacken our diligence in sounding an alarm, and reminding our hearers of their continual danger.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

Bear Sir, January 26, 1775.

I LATELY read a volume of Mr. Baxter's, (in the fifth volume of the Morning Exercises,) on Matth. v. 16. My mind is something impressed with the subject, and with his manner of treating it. Some of Mr. Baxter's sentiments in divinity are rather cloudy, and he sometimes upon that account met with but poor quar-

ter from the staunch Calvinists of his day. But, by what I have read of him, where he is quiet, and not ruffled by controversy, he appears to me, notwithstanding some mistakes, to have been one of the greatest men of his age, and perhaps in fervour, spirituality, and success, more than equal, both as a minister and a Christian, to some twenty, taken together, of those who affect to undervalue him in this present day. There is a spirit in some passages of his Saint's Rest, his Dying Thoughts, and other of his practical treatises, compared with which, many modern compositions, though well written and well meant, appear to me to a great disadvantage. But I was speaking of his sermon. He points out the way at which we should aim to let our light shine in the world, for the glory of God, and the conviction and edification of men. I have mentioned where it is to be found, that, if you have the Morning Exercises, or they should come in your way, you may look at it. I think you would like it. The perusal suggested to me some instruction, and much reproof. Alas! my friend, are we not too often chargeable with a sad, shameful selfishness and narrowness of spirit, far, very far different from that activity, enlargement, and generosity of soul, which such a Gospel as we have received might be expected to produce? For myself, I must plead guilty. It seems as if my heart was always awake, and keenly sensible to my *own* concernments, while those of my Lord and Master affect me much less forcibly, at least only by intervals. Were a stranger to judge of me by what I sometimes say in the pulpit, he might think that, like the angels, I had but two things in view, to do the will of God, and to behold his face. But, alas! would he not be almost as much mistaken, as if, seeing Mr. G**** in the cha-

racter of a tragedy-hero, he should suppose him to be the very person whom he only represents. I hope Satan will never be able to persuade me that I am a *mere hypocrite* and *stage-player;* but sure I am, that there is so much hypocrisy in me, so many littlenesses and self-seekings insinuating into my plan of conduct, that I have humbling cause to account myself unworthy and unprofitable, and to say, "Enter not into "judgment with thy servant, O Lord." I have some tolerable idea of what a Christian ought to be, and it is, I hope, what I desire to be. A Christian should be conformable to Christ in his spirit and in his practice; that is, he should be spiritually minded, dead to the world, filled with zeal for the glory of God, the spread of the Gospel, and the good of souls. He should be humble, patient, meek, cheerful, thankful under all events and changes. He should account it the business and honour of his life to imitate Him, who pleased not himself, who went about doing good, and has expressed to us the very feelings of his heart, in that divine aphorism, which surpasses all the fine admired sayings of the philosophers, as much as the sun outshines a candle, "It is more blessed to give than to "receive." The whole deportment of a Christian should show that the knowledge of Jesus, which he has received from the Gospel, affords him all he could expect from it; a balm for every grief, an amends for every loss, a motive for every duty, a restraint from every evil, a pattern for every thing which he is called to do or suffer, and a principle sufficient to constitute the actions of every day, even in common life, acts of religion. He should, (as the children of this world are wise to do in their generation,) make every occurrence through which he passes subservient and subordinate

to his main design. Gold is the worldly man's god, and his worship and service are uniform and consistent, not by fits and starts, but, from morning to night, from the beginning to the end of the year, he is the same man. He will not slip an opportunity of adding to his pelf to-day, because he may have another to-morrow, but he heartily and eagerly embraces both; and so far as he carries his point, though his perseverance may expose him to the ridicule or reproach of his neighbours, he thinks himself well paid, and says,

Populus me sibilat; at mihi plaudo
Ipse domi, simul nummos contemplor in arca.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

Dear Sir, January—1776.

I MAY learn, (only I am a sad dunce,) by small and common incidents, as well as by some more striking and important turns in life, that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. It is not for me to say, To-day or to-morrow I will do this or that. I cannot write a letter to a friend without leave or without help, for neither opportunity nor ability are at my own disposal. It is not needful that the Lord should raise a mountain in my way, to stop my purpose; if he only withdraw a certain kind of imperceptible support, which in general I have, and use without duly considering whose it is; then, in a moment, I feel myself unstrung and disabled, like a ship that has lost her masts, and can-

not proceed till he is pleased to refit me and renew my strength. My pride and prosperity to self-dependence render frequent changes of this kind necessary to me, or I should soon forget what I am, and sacrifice to my own drag. Therefore, upon the whole, I am satisfied, and see it best that I should be absolutely poor and penniless in myself, and forced to depend upon the Lord for the smallest things as well as the greatest.—And if, by this blessing, my experience should at length tally with my judgment in this point, that without him I can do nothing; then I know I shall find it easy, through him, to do all things; for the door of his mercy is always open, and it is but ask and have. But, alas! a secret persuasion, (though contrary to repeated convictions,) that I have something at home, too often prevents me going to him for it, and then no wonder I am disappointed. The life of faith seems so simple and easy in theory, that I can point it out to others in few words; but in practice it is very difficult, and my advances are so slow, that I hardly dare say I get forward at all. It is a great thing indeed to have the spirit of a little child, so as to be habitually afraid of taking a single step without leading.

I have heard of you more than once since I heard from you, and am glad to know the Lord is still with you; I trust he has not withdrawn wholly from us.—We have much call for thankfulness, and much for humiliation. Some have been removed, some are evidently ripening for glory, and now and then we have a new inquirer. But the progress of wickedness amongst the unconverted here is awful. Convictions repeatedly stifled in many, have issued in a hardness and boldness in sinning, which I believe is seldom found but in those places where the light of the Gospel has been long re-

sisted and abused. If my eyes suitably affected my heart, I should weep day and night upon this account; but, alas! I am too indifferent. I feel a woful defect in my zeal for God and compassion for souls; and when Satan and conscience charge me with cowardice, treachery, and stupidity, I know not what to reply I am generally carried through my public work with some liberty, and because I am not put to shame before the people, I seem content and satisfied. I wish to be more thankful for what the Lord is pleased to do amongst us, but, at the same time, to be more earnest with him, for a further out-pouring of his Spirit. Assist me herein with your prayers.

As to my own private experience, the enemy is not suffered to touch the foundation of my faith and hope; thus far I have peace. But my conflicts and exercises, with the effects of indwelling sin, are very distressing. I cannot doubt of my state and acceptance; and yet it seems no one can have more cause for doubts and fears than myself, if such doubtings were at all encouraged by the Gospel; but I see they are not; I see that what I want and hope for, the Lord promises to do for his own name's sake, and with a *non obstante* to all my vileness and perverseness; and I cannot question but he has given me, (for how else could I have it?) a thirst for that communion with him in love and conformity to his image, of which, as yet, I have experienced but very faint and imperfect beginnings. But if he has begun, I venture, upon his word, that he will not forsake the work of his own hands.

On public affairs I say but little. Many are censuring men and measures; but I would lay all the blame upon sin. It appears plain to me that the Lord has a controversy with us; and therefore I fear what

we have yet seen is but the beginning of sorrows. I am ready to dread the event of this summer; but I remember the Lord reigns. He has his own glory and the good of his church in view, and will not be disappointed. He knows how likewise to take care of those who fear him. I wish there was more sighing and mourning amongst professors, for the sins of the nation and the churches. But I must conclude, and am, &c.

LETTER VI.

Dear Sir,

NO very considerable alteration has taken place since I wrote, except the death of Mrs. L****, who was removed to a better world in September last. The latter part of her course was very painful; but the Lord made her more than conqueror, and she had good cause to apply the apostle's words, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. She repeated that passage in her last illness, and chose it for her funeral text. She was a Christian indeed. Her faith was great, and so were her trials. Now she is above them all, now she is before the throne. The good Lord help us to be followers of those who through faith and patience have attained to the hope set before them.

The number of professors still increases with us, and a greater number of persons affords a greater variety of cases, and gives greater scope to observe the workings of the heart and Satan. For seven years I had to say, that I had not seen a person of whom I had conceived a good hope, go back; but I have met with a few disappointments since. However, upon the whole,

I trust the Lord is still with us. The enemy tries to disturb and defile us, and if the Lord did not keep the city, the poor watchman would wake in vain. But the eye that never slumbereth nor sleepeth has been upon us for good; and though we have cause of humiliation and complaint, we have likewise much cause of thankfulness. My health is still preserved; and I hope that the Lord does not suffer my desires of personal communion with him, and of usefulness in the ministry, to decline. He supplies me with fresh strength and matter in my public work: I hear now and then of one brought to inquire the way; and his presence is at times made known to many in the ordinances.

To combine zeal with prudence is indeed difficult. There is often too much self in our zeal, and too much of the fear of man in our prudence. However, what we cannot *attain* by any skill or resolution of our own, we may hope in measure to *receive* from him who giveth liberally to those who seek him, and desire to serve him. Prudence is a word much abused; but there is a heavenly wisdom, which the Lord has promised to give to those who humbly wait upon him for it. It does not consist in forming a bundle of rules and maxims, but in a spiritual taste and discernment derived from an experimental knowledge of the truth, and of the heart of man, as described in the word of God; and its exercise consists much in a simple dependence upon the Lord, to guide and prompt us in every action. We seldom act wrong, when we truly depend upon him, and can cease from leaning to our own understanding. When the heart is thus in a right tune and frame, and his word dwells richly in us, there is a kind of immediate perception of what is proper for us to do in present circumstances, without much painful

inquiry; a light shines before us upon the path of duty; and if he permits us in such a spirit to make some mistakes, he will likewise teach us to profit by them; and our reflections upon what was wrong one day, will make us to act more wisely the next. At the best, we must always expect to meet with new proofs of our own weakness and insufficiency; otherwise, how should we be kept humble, or know how to prize the liberty he allows us of coming to the throne of grace, for fresh forgiveness and direction every day? But if he enables us to walk before him with a single eye, he will graciously accept our desire of serving him better if we could, and his blessing will make our feeble endeavours in some degree successful, at the same time that we see defects and evils attending our best services sufficient to make us ashamed of them.

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

Dear Sir, January 11, 1777.

WE all need, and at the seasons the Lord sees best we all receive, chastisement. I hope you likewise have reason to praise him, for supporting, sanctifying, and delivering mercy. The coward flesh presently shrinks under the rod, but faith need not fear it; for it is in the hand of one who loves us better than we do ourselves, and who knows our frame that we are but dust, and therefore will not suffer us to be overdone and overwhelmed.

I feel as a friend should feel for Mr. B****; were I able, I would soon send him health. If the Lord, who is able to remove his illness in a minute, permits it to continue, we may be sure, upon the whole, it will

be better for him. It is, however, very lawful to pray that his health may be restored, and his usefulness prolonged. I beg you to give my love to him, and tell him that my heart bears him an affectionate remembrance; and I know the God whom he serves will make every dispensation supportable and profitable to him.

If, as you observe, the Song of Solomon describes the experience of his church, it shows the dark as well as the bright side. No one part of it is the experience of every individual at any particular time. Some are in his banqueting-house, others upon their beds. Some sit under his banner, supported by his arm; while others have a faint perception of him at a distance, with many a hill and mountain between. In one thing, however, they all agree, that he is the leading object of their desires, and that they have had such a discovery of his person, work, and love, as makes him precious to their hearts. Their judgment of him is always the same, but their sensibility varies. The love they bear him, though rooted and grounded in their hearts, is not always equally in exercise, nor can it be so. We are like trees, which though alive, cannot put forth their leaves and fruit without the influence of the sun. They are alive in winter as well as in summer; but how different is their appearance in these different seasons! Were we always alike, could we always believe, love, and rejoice, we should think the power inherent, and our own; but it is more for the Lord's glory, and more suited to form us to a temper becoming the Gospel, that we should be made deeply sensible of our own inability and dependence, than that we should be always in a lively frame. I am persuaded a broken and a contrite spirit, a conviction of our vileness and nothingness, connected with a cordial acceptance of Jesus as revealed in the

Gospel, is the highest attainment we can reach in this life. Sensible comforts are desirable, and we must be sadly declined when they do not appear so to us; but I believe there may be a real exercise of faith and growth in grace, when our sensible feelings are faint and low. A soul may be in as thriving a state when thirsting, seeking, and mourning after the Lord, as when actually rejoicing in him, as much in earnest when fighting in the valley, as when singing upon the mount; nay, dark seasons afford the surest and strongest manifestations of the power of faith. To hold fast the word of promise, to maintain a hatred of sin, to go on steadfastly in the path of duty, in defiance both of the frowns and the smiles of the world, when we have but little comfort, is a more certain evidence of grace, than a thousand things which we may do or forbear when our spirits are warm and lively. I have seen many who have been, upon the whole, but uneven walkers, though at times they have seemed to enjoy, at least have talked of great comforts. I have seen others, for the most part, complain of much darkness and coldness, who have been remarkably humble, tender, and exemplary in their spirit and conduct. Surely, were I to choose my lot, it should be with the latter.

I am, &c.

THREE LETTERS

TO

MRS. G****.

LETTER I.

Madam, June 20, 1776.

IT would be both unkind and ungrateful in me, to avail myself on any plea of business, for delaying the acknowledgment I owe you for your acceptable favour from ****, which, though dated the 6th instant, I did not receive till the 10th.

Could I have known in time that you was at Mr. ****'s, I should have endeavoured to have called upon you while there; and very glad should I have been to have seen you with us. But they who fear the Lord may be sure, that whatever is not practicable is not necessary. He could have over-ruled every difficulty in your way, had he seen it expedient; but he is pleased to show you, that you depend not upon men, but upon himself; and that, notwithstanding your connexions may exclude you from some advantages in point of outward means, he who has begun a good work in you, is able to carry it on, in defiance of all seeming hindrances, and make all things, (even those which have the most unfavourable appearances,) work together for your good.

A sure effect of his grace, is a desire and longing for

Gospel-ordinances; and when they are afforded, they cannot be neglected without loss. But the Lord sees many souls who are dear to him, and whom he is training up in a growing meetness for his kingdom, who are by his providence so situated, that it is not in their power to attend upon Gospel preaching; and perhaps they have seldom either Christian minister or Christian friend to assist or comfort them. Such a situation is a state of trial; but Jesus is all-sufficient, and he is always near. They connot be debarred from his word of grace; which is every where at hand, nor from his throne of grace, for they who feel their need of him, and whose hearts are drawn towards him, are always at the foot of it. Every room in the house, yea, every spot they stand on, fields, lanes, and hedge-rows, all is holy ground to them; for the Lord is there. The chief difference between us and the disciples, when our Saviour was upon earth, is in this: they then walked by sight, and we are called to walk by faith. They could see him with their bodily eyes, we cannot; but he said before he left them, "It is expedient for you "that I go away." How could this be, unless that spiritual communion which he promised to maintain with his people after his ascension, were preferable to that intercourse he allowed them whilst he was visibly with them? But we are sure it is preferable, and they who had tried both were well satisfied he had made good his promise; so that, though they had known him after the flesh, they were content not to know him so any more. Yes, madam, though we cannot see him, he sees us, he is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. In a natural state, we have very dark, and indeed dishonourable thoughts of God; we conceive of him as

at a distance. But when the heart is awakened, we begin to make Jacob's reflection, "Surely, the Lord is "in this place, and I knew it not." And when we receive faith, we begin to know that this ever-present God is in Christ; that the government of heaven and earth, the dispensations of the kingdom of nature, providence, and grace, are in the hands of Jesus; that it is he with whom we have to do, who once suffered agony and death for our redemption, and whose compassion and tenderness are the same, now he reigns over all blessed for ever, as when he conversed amongst men in the days of his humiliation. Thus God is made known to us by the Gospel, in the endearing views of a Saviour, a Shepherd, a Husband, a Friend; and a way of access is opened for us through the veil, that is, the human nature of our Redeemer, to enter, with humble confidence, into the holiest of all, and to repose all our cares and concerns upon the strength of that everlasting arm which upholds heaven and earth, and upon that infinite love which submitted to the shame, pain, and death of the cross, to redeem sinners from wrath and misery.

Though there is a height, a breadth, a length, and a depth, in this mystery of redeeming love, exceeding the comprehension of all finite minds; yet the great and leading principles which are necessary for the support and comfort of our souls, may be summed up in a very few words. Such a summary we are favoured with in Titus ii. 11—14. where the whole of salvation, all that is needful to be known, experienced, practised, and hoped for, is comprised within the compass of four verses. If many books, much study, and great discernment, were necessary in order to be happy, what

must the poor and simple do? Yet for them especially is the Gospel designed; and few but such as these attain the knowledge and comfort of it. The Bible is a sealed book till the heart be awakened, and then he that runs may read. The propositions are few; I am a sinner, therefore I need a Saviour, one who is able and willing to save to the uttermost; such a one is Jesus; he is all that I want, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But will he receive me? Can I answer a previous question? Am I willing to receive him? If so, and if his word may be taken, if he meant what he said, and promised no more than he can perform, I may be sure of a welcome: he knew long before, the doubts, fears, and suspicions which would arise in my mind when I should come to know what I am, what I have done, and what I have deserved; and therefore he declared, before he left the earth, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no-" wise cast out." I have no money or price in my hand, no worthiness to recommend me; and I need none, for he saveth freely for his own name's sake. I have only to be thankful for what he has already shown me, and to wait upon him for more. It is my part to commit myself to him as the physician of sin-sick souls, not to prescribe to him how he shall treat me. To begin, carry on, and perfect the cure, is his part.

The doubts and fears you speak of, are in a greater or less degree, the common experience of all the Lord's people, at least for a time; whilst any unbelief remains in the heart, and Satan is permitted to tempt, we shall feel these things. In themselves they are groundless and evil; yet the Lord permits and over-rules them for good. They tend to make us know more of the

plague of our own hearts, and feel more sensibly the need of a Saviour, and make his rest, (when we attain it,) doubly sweet and sure. And they likewise qualify us for pitying and comforting others. Fear not; only believe, wait, and pray. Expect not all at once. A Christian is not of hasty growth, like a mushroom, but rather like the oak, the progress of which is hardly perceptible, but in time becomes a great deep-rooted tree. If my writings have been useful to you, may the Lord have the praise. To administer any comfort to his children is the greatest honour and pleasure I can receive in this life. I cannot promise to be a very punctual correspondent, having many engagements; but I hope to do all in my power to show myself, madam,

Yours, &c.

LETTER II.

Madam, August 20, 1776.

THOUGH in general I think myself tolerably punctual when I can answer a letter in six or seven weeks after the receipt, yet I feel some pain for not having acknowledged yours sooner. A case like that which you have favoured me with an account of, deserved an immediate attention, and when I read it, I proposed writing within a post or two, and I can hardly allow any plea of business to be sufficient excuse for delaying it so long; but our times are in the Lord's hands: may he now enable me to send you what may prove a word in season.

Your exercises have been by no means singular, though they may appear so to yourself; because, in your retired situation, you have not, (as you observe,) had much opportunity of knowing the experience of other Christians; nor has the guilt with which your mind has been so greatly burdened been properly your own. It was a temptation forced upon you by the enemy, and he shall answer for it. Undoubtedly it is a mournful proof of the depravity of our nature, that there is that within us which renders us so easily susceptive of his suggestions; a proof of our extreme weakness, that after the clearest and most satisfying evidences of the truth, we are not able to hold fast our confidence, if the Lord permits Satan to sift and shake us. But I can assure you these changes are not uncommon. I have known persons, who, after walking with God comfortably in the main for forty years, have been at their wit's end from such assaults as you mention, and been brought to doubt, not only of the reality of their own hopes, but of the very ground and foundation upon which their hopes were built. Had you remained, as it seems you once were, attached to the vanities of a gay and dissipated life, or could you have been content with a form of godliness, destitute of the power, it is probable you would have remained a stranger to these troubles. Satan would have employed his arts in a different and less perceptible way, to have soothed you into a false peace, and prevented any thought or suspicion of danger from arising in your mind. But when he could no longer detain you in his bondage, or seduce you back again into the world, then of course he would change his method, and declare open war against you. A specimen of his power and

malice you have experienced; and the Lord, whom you loved, because he first loved you, permitted it, not to gratify Satan, but for your benefit—to humble and prove you, to show you what is in your heart, and to do you good in the issue. These things, for the present, are not joyous, but grievous; yet in the end they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. In the mean time his eye is upon you; he has appointed bounds both to the degree and the duration of the trial; and he does and will afford you such supports, that you shall not be tried beyond what you are enabled to bear. I doubt not but your conflicts and sorrows will in due time terminate in praise and victory, and be sanctified to your fuller establishment in the truth.

I greatly rejoice in the Lord's goodness to your dying parent. How wisely timed, and how exactly suited, was that affecting dispensation, to break the force of those suggestions with which the enemy was aiming to overwhelm your spirit! He could not stand against such an illustrious demonstrative attestation, that the doctrines you had embraced were not cunningly devised fables. He could proceed no further in that way; but he is fruitful in resources. His next attempt, of course, was to fix guilt upon your conscience, as if you had yourself formed and willingly entertained those thoughts, which, indeed you suffered with extreme reluctance and pain. Here likewise I find he succeeded for a time; but he who broke the former snare, will deliver you from this likewise.

The dark and dishonourable thoughts of God, which I hinted at as belonging to a natural state, are very different from the thoughts of your heart concerning him. You do not conceive of him as a hard master, or

think you could be more happy in the breach than in the observance of his precepts. You do not prefer the world to his favour, or think you can please him, and make amends for your sins by an obedience of your own. These, and such as these, are the thoughts of the natural heart; the very reverse of yours. One thought, however, I confess you have indulged, which is no less dishonourable to the Lord than uncomfortable to yourself. You say, "I dare not believe that "God will not impute to me as sin, the admission of "thoughts which my soul ever abhorred, and to which "my will never consented." Nay, you fear lest they should not only be imputed, but unpardonable. But how can this be possible? Indeed I will not call it your *thought*, it is your *temptation*. You tell me you have children. Then you will easily feel a plain illustration, which just now occurs to me. Let me suppose a case which has sometimes happened: a child, three or fours years of age we will say, while playing incautiously at a little distance from home, should be suddenly seized and carried away by a gipsy. Poor thing! how terrified, how distressed must it be! Methinks I hear its cries. The sight and violence of the stranger, the recollection of its dear parents, the loss of its pleasing home, the dread and uncertainty of what is yet to befall it; is it not a wonder that it does not die in agonies? But see, help is at hand: the gipsy is pursued, and the child recovered. Now, my dear madam, permit me to ask you, if this were your child, how would you receive it? Perhaps, when the first transports of your joy for its safety would permit you, you might gently chide it for leaving your door; but would you disinherit it? Would you disown it? Would you deliver it up again to the gipsy with your

own hands, because it had suffered a violence which it could not withstand, *which it abhorred, and to which its will never consented?* And yet what is the tenderness of a mother, of ten thousand mothers, to that which our compassionate Saviour bears to every poor soul that has been enabled to flee to him for salvation! Let us be far from charging that to him, of which we think we are utterly incapable ourselves. Take courage, madam, resist the devil, and he will flee from you. If he were to tempt you to any thing criminal, you would start at the thought, and renounce it with abhorrence. Do the same when he tempts you to question the Lord's compassion and goodness. But there he imposes upon us with a show of humility, and persuades us that we do well to oppose our unworthiness as a sufficient exception to the many express promises of the word. It is said, the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin; that all manner of sin shall be forgiven for his sake; that whoever cometh he will in nowise cast out; and that he is able to save to the uttermost. Believe his word, and Satan shall be found a liar. If the child had deliberately gone away with the gipsy; had preferred that wretched way of life; had refused to return, though frequently and tenderly invited home, perhaps a parent's love might, in time, be too weak to plead for the pardon of such continued obstinacy. But, indeed, in this manner we have all dealt with the Lord; and yet, whenever we are willing to return, he is willing to receive us with open arms, and without an upbraiding word; Luke xv. 20—22. Though our sins have been deep-dyed, like scarlet and crimson, enormous as mountains, and countless as the sands, the sum total is, but, *Sin has abounded;* but where sin hath

abounded, grace has much more abounded. After all, I know the Lord keeps the key of comfort in his own hands, yet he has commanded us to attempt comforting one another. I should rejoice to be his instrument of administering comfort to you. I shall hope to hear from you soon; and that you will then be able to inform me he has restored to you the joys of his salvation. But if not yet, wait for him, and you shall not wait in vain.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

My Dear Madam, June—1777.

TEMPTATIONS may be compared to the wind, which when it has ceased raging from one point, after a short calm, frequently renews its violence from another quarter. The Lord silenced Satan's former assaults against you, but he is permitted to try you again in another way. Be of good courage, madam, wait upon the Lord, and the present storm shall likewise subside in good time. You have an infallible Pilot, and are embarked in a bottom against which the winds and waves cannot prevail. You may be tossed about, and think yourself in apparent jeopardy, but sink you shall not, except the promises and faithfulness of God can fail. Upon an attentive consideration of your complaint, it seems to me to amount only to this, that though the Lord has done great things for you, he has not yet brought you to a state of independence on himself, nor released you from that impossibility which all his peo-

ple feel, of doing any thing without him. And is this, indeed, a matterof complaint? Is it not every way better, more for his glory, and more suited to keep us mindful of our obligations to him, and, in the event, more for our safety, that we should be reduced to a happy necessity of receiving daily out of his fulness, (as the Israelites received the manna,) than to be set up with something of a stock of wisdom, power, and goodness of our own? Adam was thus furnished at the beginning with strength to stand; yet mutability being essential to a creature, he quickly fell and lost all. We who are by nature sinners, are not left to so hazardous an experiment. He has himself engaged to keep us, and treasured up all fulness of grace for our support, in a head who cannot fail. Our gracious Saviour will communicate all needful supplies to his members, yet in such a manner that they shall feel their need and weakness, and have nothing to boast of from first to last but his wisdom, compassion, and care. We are in no worse circumstances than the apostle Paul, who, though eminent and exemplary in the Christian life, found and freely confessed that he had no sufficiency in himself to think a good thought. Nor did he wish it otherwise; he even gloried in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Unbelief, and a thousand evils, are still in our hearts; though their reign and dominion is at an end, they are not slain nor eradicated; their effects will be felt more or less sensibly, as the Lord is pleased more or less to afford or abate his gracious influence. When they are kept down we are no better in ourselves, for they are not kept down by us; but we are very prone to think better of ourselves at such a time, and there-

fore he is pleased to permit us at seasons to feel a difference, that we may never forget how weak and how vile we are. We cannot absolutely conquer these evils, but it becomes us to be humbled for them; and we are to fight, and strive, and pray against them. Our great duty is to be at his footstool, and cry to him who has promised to perform all things for us. Why are we called soldiers, but because we are called to a warfare? And how could we fight, if there were no enemies to resist? The Lord's soldiers are not merely for show, to make an empty parade in an uniform, and to brandish their arms when none but friends and spectators are around them. No, we must stand upon the field of battle; we must face the fiery darts; we must wrestle, (which is the closest and most arduous kind of fighting,) with our foes; nor can we well expect wholly to escape wounds; but the leaves of the tree of life are provided for their healing. The Captain of our salvation is at hand, and leads us on with an assurance which might make even a coward bold—that, in the end, we shall be more than conquerors through him who has loved us.

I am ready to think that some of the sentiments in your letters are not properly yours, such as you yourself have derived from the Scriptures, but rather borrowed from authors or preachers, whose judgment your humility has led you to prefer to your own. At least, I am sure the Scripture does not authorize the conclusion which distresses you; that if you were a child of God you should not feel such changes and oppositions. Were I to define a Christian, or rather to describe him at large, I know no text I would choose sooner as a ground for the subject, than Gal.

v. 17. A Christian has noble aims, which distinguish him from the bulk of mankind. His leading principles, motives, and desires, are all supernatural and divine. Could he do as he would, there is not a spirit before the throne should excel him in holiness, love, and obedience. He would tread in the very footsteps of his Saviour, fill up every moment in his service, and employ every breath in his praise. This he would do, but, alas! he cannot. Against this desire of the spirit, there is a contrary desire and working of a corrupt nature, which meets him at every turn. He has a beautiful copy set before him; he is enamoured with it, and though he does not expect to equal it, he writes carefully after it, and longs to attain to the nearest possible imitation. But indwelling sin and Satan continually jog his hand, and spoil his strokes. You cannot, Madam, form a right judgment of yourself, except you make due allowance for those things which are not peculiar to yourself, but common to all who have spiritual perception, and are indeed the inseparable appendages of this mortal state. If it were not so, why should the most spiritual and gracious people be so ready to confess themselves vile and worthless? One eminent branch of our holiness, is a sense of shame and humiliation for those evils which are only known to ourselves, and to him who searches our hearts, joined with an acquiescence in Jesus, who is appointed of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. I will venture to assure you, that though you will possess a more stable peace, in proportion as the Lord enables you to live more simply upon the blood, righteousness, and grace of the Mediator, you will never grow into a better opinion of your-

self than you have at present. The nearer you are brought to him, the quicker sense you will have of your continual need of him, and thereby your admiration of his power, love, and compassion, will increase likewise from year to year.

I would observe further, that our spiritual exercises are not a little influenced by our constitutional temperament. As you are only an ideal correspondent, I can but conjecture about you upon this head. If your frame is delicate, and your nervous system very sensible and tender, I should probably ascribe some of your apprehensions to this cause. It is an abstruse subject, and I will not enter into it; but, according to the observations I have made, persons of this habit, seem to live more upon the confines of the invisible world, if I may so speak, and to be more suspective of impressions from it, than others. That complaint which, for want of a better name, we call lowness of spirits, may probably afford the enemy some peculiar advantages and occasions of distressing you. The mind then perceives objects as through a tinctured medium, which gives them a dark and discouraging appearance; and I believe Satan has more influence and address, than we are aware of, in managing the glass.

And when this is not the case at all times, it may be so occasionally, from sickness or other circumstances. You tell me that you have lately been ill, which, together with your present situation, and the prospect of your approaching hour, may probably have such an effect as I have hinted. You may be charging yourself with guilt, for what springs from indisposition, in which you are merely passive, and which may be no more properly sinful, than the head-ache, or any of

the thousand natural shocks the flesh is heir to. The enemy can take no advantage but what the Lord permits him; and he will permit him none but what he designs to over-rule for your greater advantage in the end. He delights in your prosperity; and you should not be in heaviness for an hour, were there not a needbe for it. Notwithstanding your fears, I have a good hope, that he who you say has helped you in six troubles, will appear for you in the seventh; that you will not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord, and come forth to testify to his praise that he has turned your mourning into joy.

I am, &c.

TWO LETTERS

TO

Miss F****.

LETTER I.

Dear Madam, October 3, 1778.

YOU would have me tell you what are the best means to be used by a young person, to prevent the world, with all its opening and ensnaring scenes, from drawing the heart aside from God. It is an important question; but I apprehend your own heart will tell you, that you are already possessed of all the information concerning it which you can well expect from me. I could only attempt to answer it from the Bible, which lies open to you likewise. If your heart is like mine, it must confess, that when it turns aside from God, it is seldom through ignorance of the proper means or motives which should have kept us near him, but rather from an evil principle within, which prevails against our better judgment, and renders us unfaithful to light already received.

I could offer you rules, cautions, and advices in abundance; for I find it comparatively easy to preach to others. But if you should further ask me, How you shall effectually reduce them to practice? I feel that I am so deficient, and so much at a loss in this matter *myself*, that I know not well what to say to *you*. Yet something must be said.

In the first place, then, I would observe, that though

it be our bounden duty, and the highest privilege we can propose to ourselves, to have our hearts kept close to the Lord; yet we must not expect it absolutely or perfectly, much less all at once: we shall keep close to him, in proportion as we are solidly convinced of the infinite disparity between him and the things which would presume to stand in competition with him, and the folly, as well as ingratitude, of departing from him. But these points are only to be learned by experience, and by smarting under a series of painful disappointments in our expectations from creatures. Our judgments may be quickly satisfied that his favour is better than life, while yet it is in the power of a mere trifle to turn us aside. The Lord permits us to feel our weakness, that we may be sensible of it; for though we are ready in words to confess that we are weak, we do not so properly know it, till that secret, though unallowed, dependence we have upon some strength in ourselves, is brought to the trial, and fails us. To be humble, and like a little child, afraid of taking a step alone, and so conscious of snares and dangers around us, as to cry to him continually to hold us up that we may be safe, is the sure, the infallible, the only secret of walking closely with him.

But how shall we attain this humble frame of spirit? It must be, as I said, from a real and sensible conviction of our weakness and vileness, which we cannot learn, (at least I have not been able to learn it,) merely from books or preachers. The providence of God concurs with his Holy Spirit in his merciful design of making us acquainted with ourselves. It is indeed a great mercy to be preserved from such declensions as might fall under the notice of our fellow-creatures; but when *they* can observe nothing of consequence to ob-

ject to us, things may be far from right with us in the sight of him who judges not only actions, but the thoughts and first motions of the heart. And indeed could we for a season so cleave to God as to find little or nothing in ourselves to be ashamed of, we are such poor creatures, that we should presently grow vain and self-sufficient, and expose ourselves to the greatest danger of falling.

There are, however, means to be observed on our part; and though you know them, I will repeat the principal, because you desire me. The first is Prayer; and here, above all things, we should pray for humility. It may be called both the guard of all other graces, and the soil in which they grow. The second, Attention to the Scripture. Your question is directly answered in Psalm cxix. 9. The precepts are our rule and delight, the promises our strength and encouragement: the good recorded of the saints is proposed for our encouragement; their miscarriages are as land-marks set up to warn us of the rocks and shoals which lie in the way of our passage. The study of the whole scheme of Gospel-salvation, respecting the person, life, doctrine, death, and glory of our Redeemer, is appointed to form our souls to a spiritual and divine taste; and so far as this prevails and grows in us, the trifles that would draw us from the Lord, will lose their influence, and appear, divested of the glare with which they strike the senses, mere vanity and nothing. The third grand means is, Consideration or Recollection; a careful regard to those temptations and snares, to which, from our tempers, situations, or connexions, we are more immediately exposed, and by which we have been formerly hindered. It may be well in the morning, ere we leave our chambers, to forecast, as far as we are

able, the probable circumstances of the day before us. Yet the observance of this, as well as of every rule that can be offered, may dwindle into a mere form. However, I trust the Lord, who has given you a desire to live to him, will be your guard and teacher. There is none teacheth like him.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

Dear Madam, March—1779.

OUR experiences pretty much tally; they may be drawn out into sheets and quires, but the sum total may be comprised in a short sentence, "Our life is a war-"fare." For our encouragement, the apostle calls it a *good* warfare. We are engaged in a good cause, fight under a good Captain, the victory is sure beforehand, and the prize is a crown, a crown of life. Such considerations might make even a coward bold. But then we must be content to fight; and, considering the nature, number, situation, and subtilty of our enemies, we may expect sometimes to receive a wound: but there is a medicinal tree, the leaves of which are always at hand to heal us. We cannot be too attentive to the evil which is always working in us, or to the stratagems which are employed against us; yet our attention should not be wholly confined to these things. We are to look upwards likewise to him, who is our head, our life, our strength. One glance of Jesus will convey more effectual assistance, than poring upon our own hearts for a month. The one is to be done, but the other should, upon no account, be omitted. It was not by counting their wounds, but by beholding the brazen serpent, the

Lord's instituted means of cure, that the Israelites were healed. That was an emblem for our instruction. One great cause of our frequent conflicts is, that we have a secret desire to be rich, and it is the Lord's design to make us poor: we want to gain an ability of doing something; and he suits his dispensations, to convince us that we can do nothing: we want a stock in ourselves, and he would have us absolutely dependent upon him. So far as we are content to be weak, that his power may be magnified in us, so far we shall make our enemies know that we are strong, though we ourselves shall never be directly sensible that we are so; only by comparing what we are, with the opposition we stand against, we may come to a comfortable conclusion, that the Lord worketh mightily in us. Psalm xli. 11.

If our views are simple, and our desires towards the Lord, it may be of use to consider some of your faults and mine, not as the faults of you and me in particular, but as the fault of that depraved nature, which is common with us to all the Lord's people, and which made Paul groan as feelingly and as heartily as we can do. But this consideration, though true and Scriptural, can only be safely applied when the mind is sincerely and in good earnest devoted to the Lord. There are too many unsound and half professors, who eagerly catch at it, as an excuse for those evils they are unwilling to part with. But I trust I may safely recommend it to you. This evil nature, this indwelling sin, is a living principle, an active, powerful cause; and a cause that is active, will necessarily produce an effect. Sin is the same thing in believers, as in the unregenerate; they have, indeed, a contrary principle of grace, which counteracts and resists it, which can prevent its outbreak-

ings, but will not suppress its risings. As grace resists sin, so sin resists grace, Gal. v. 17. The proper tendency of each is mutually weakened on both sides; and between the two, the poor believer, however blameless and exemplary in the sight of men, appears in his own view the most inconsistent character under the sun. He can hardly think it is so with others, and judging of *them* by what he *sees*, and of *himself* by what he *feels*, in lowliness of heart he esteems others better than himself. This proves him to be right; for it is the will of God concerning him, Phil. ii. 3. This is the warfare. But it shall not be always so. Grace shall prevail. The evil nature is already enervated, and ere long it shall die the death. Jesus will make us more than conquerors.

I am, &c.

FOUR LETTERS

TO THE

REV. DR. ****.

LETTER I.

Dear Sir, April 17, 1776.

BY this time I hope you are both returned in peace, and happy together in your stated favoured tract; rejoicing in the name of Jesus yourselves, and rejoicing to see the savour of it spreading like a precious perfume among the people. Every day I hope you find prejudices wearing off, and more disposed to hear the words of life. The Lord has given you a fine first-fruits, which I trust will prove the earnest of a plentiful harvest. In the mean time he will enable you to sow the seed in patience, leaving the event in his hands. Though it does not spring up visibly at once, it will not be lost. I think he would not have sent you if he had not a people there to call; but they can only come forth to view as he is pleased to bring them. Satan will try to hinder and disturb you; but he is in a chain which he cannot break, nor go a step further than he is permitted. And if you have been instrumental to the conversion of but a few, in those few you have an ample reward already for all the difficulties you have or can meet with. It is more honourable and important to be an instrument of saving one soul, than to rescue a whole kingdom from temporal ruin. Let us, therefore, while we earnestly desire to be more useful, not forget to be thankful for what the Lord has been pleased already to

do for us; and let us expect, knowing whose servants we are, and what a Gospel we preach, to see some new miracles wrought from day to day: for indeed every real conversion may be accounted miraculous, being no less than an immediate exertion of that power which made the heavens, and commanded the light to shine out of darkness. Your little telescope is safe. I wish I had more of that clear air and sunshine you speak of, that with you I might have more distinct views of the land of promise. I cannot say my prospect is greatly clouded by doubts of my reaching it at last; but then there is such a languor and deadness hangs upon my mind, that it is almost amazing to me how I can entertain any hopes at all. It seems, if doubting could ever be reasonable, there is no one who has greater reason for doubting than myself. But I know not how to doubt, when I consider the faithfulness, grace, and compassion of him who has promised. If it could be proved that Christ had not died, or that he did not speak the words which are ascribed to him in the Gospel, or that he is not able to make them good, or that his word cannot safely be taken; in any of these cases I should doubt to purpose, and lie down in despair.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

My Dear Sir, July 15, 1777.

I BEGIN with congratulations first to you and Mrs. ****, on your safe journey and good passage over the formidable Humber. Mrs. **** has another river to cross, (may it be many years before she approaches the bank,) over which there is no bridge. Perhaps at seasons

she may think of it with that reluctance which she felt before she saw the Humber; but as her fears were then agreeably disappointed, and she found the experiment, when called to make it, neither terrifying nor dangerous, so I trust she will find it in the other case. Did not she think, The Lord knows where I shall be, and he will meet me there with a storm, because I am such a sinner? Then how the billows will foam and rage at me, and what a long passage I shall have, and perhaps I shall sink in the middle, and never set my foot in Hull. It is true, I am not so much afraid of the journey I go by land, though I know that every step of the way the horses or the chaise may fall, and I be killed; but how do I know but he may preserve me on the road on purpose to drown me in the river? But behold, when she came to it, all was calm; or what was better, a gentle, fair breeze, to waft her pleasantly over before she was aware. Thus we are apt perversely to reason: he guides and guards me through life; he gives me new mercies, and new proofs of his power and care every day; and therefore when I come to die he will forsake me, and let me be the sport of winds and waves. Indeed, the Lord does not deserve such hard thoughts at our hands as we are prone to form of him. But notwithstanding we make such returns, he is and will be gracious, and shame us out of our unkind, ungrateful, unbelieving fears at last. If, after my repeated kind reception at your house, I should always be teasing Mrs, **** with suspicions of her good-will, and should tell every body I saw, that I verily believed the next time I went to see her she would shut the door in my face and refuse me admittance, would she not be grieved, offended, and affronted? Would she not think, What reason can he assign for this treatment? He knows I did every thing in my power to assure him

of a welcome, and told him so over and over again. Does he count me a deceiver? Yes, he does: I see his friendship is not worth preserving; so farewell: I will seek friends among such as believe my words and actions. Well, my dear Madam, I am clear I always believed you: I make no doubt but you will treat me kindly next time, as you did the last. But pray is not the Lord as worthy of being trusted as yourself? and are not his invitations and promises as hearty and as honest as yours? Let us, therefore, beware of giving way to such thoughts of him as we could hardly forgive in our dearest friends, if they should harbour the like of us.

I have heard nothing of Mr. P**** yet, but that he is in town, very busy about that precious piece of furniture called a wife. May the Lord direct and bless his choice. In Captain Cook's voyage to the South Sea, some fish were caught which looked as well as others, but those who eat of them were poisoned: alas! for the poor man who catches a poisonous wife! There are such to be met with in the matrimonial seas, that look passing well to the eye; but a connexion with them proves baneful to domestic peace, and hurtful to the life of grace. I know two or three people, perhaps a few more, who have great reason to be thankful to him who sent the fish, with the money in its mouth, to Peter's hook. He secretly instructed and guided us where to angle; and if we have caught prizes, we owe it not to our own skill, much less to our deserts, but to his goodness.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

My Dear Sir, July 4, 1777.

**** Poor little boy! it is mercy indeed that he recovered from such a formidable hurt. The Lord wounded, and the Lord healed. I ascribe, with you, what the world calls accident to him, and believe, that without his permission, for wise and good ends, a child can no more pull a bowl of boiling water on itself than it could pull the moon out of its orbit. And why does he permit such things? One reason or two is sufficient for us: it is to remind us of the uncertainty of life and all creature-comforts; to make us afraid of cleaving too close to pretty toys, which are so precarious, that often while we look at them they vanish, and to lead us to a more entire dependence upon himself; that we might never judge ourselves or our concerns safe from outward appearances only, but that the Lord is our keeper, and were not his eye upon us, a thousand dangers and painful changes, which we can neither foresee nor prevent, are lurking about us every step, ready to break in upon us every hour. Men are but children of a larger growth. How many are labouring and planning in the pursuit of things, the event of which, if they obtain them, will be but like pulling scalding water upon their own heads. They *must* have the bowl by all means, but they are not aware what is in it till they feel it.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

Sir, September 7, 1777.

I HAVE had a letter from your minister since his arrival at ****. I hope he will be restored to you again before long and that he and many of your place will rejoice long in each other. Those are favoured places which are blessed with a sound and faithful Gospel ministry, if the people know and consider the value of their privileges, and are really desirous of profiting by them: but the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. I hope those who profess the Gospel with you will wrestle in prayer for grace to walk worthy of it. A minister's hands are strengthened when he can point to his people as so many living proofs that the doctrines he preaches are doctrines according to godliness; when they walk in mutual love; when each one, in their several places, manifests an humble, spiritual, upright conduct; when they are Christians, not only at church but in the family, the shop, and the field; when they fill up their relations in life, as husbands or wives, masters or servants, parents or children, according to the rule of the word; when they are evidently a people separated from the world while conversant in it, and are careful to let their light shine before men, not only by talking, but by acting as the disciples of Christ: when they go on steadily, not by fits and starts, prizing the means of grace without resting in them: when it is thus, we can say, Now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. Then we come forth with pleasure, and our service is our delight, and we are encouraged to hope for an increasing blessing. But if the people in whom we have

rejoiced sink into formality or a worldly spirit; if they have dissentions and jealousies among themselves; if they act improperly, and give the enemies occasion to say, There, there, so would we have it; then our hearts are wounded and our zeal damped, and we know not how to speak with liberty. It is my heart's desire and prayer for you, that whether I see you, or else be absent from you, I may know that you stand fast in one spirit and one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel.

I am, &c.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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John Linesklaen

Cazenovia. N. Y.